

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FIRST-TIME ELDER LEADERSHIP IN THE  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A THESIS-PROJECT  
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BY  
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To my family:

Kristin, my wife, for constant, love, support, and encouragement;  
my parents, Bob and Mary, for instilling at an early age that I should never stop learning,  
and encouraging me to learn;  
and Duke the dog, for unlimited loving licks and happy tail wags.

Thank you.

The leader is the one who has the courage to act on what he sees.

— Andy Stanley, *Next Generation Leader*



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## PREFACE

Lay elders are important to the Presbyterian Church. In my short tenure as an ordained Presbyterian pastor and my church experience as youth director of churches before that, I have seen firsthand how important well-trained and strong leaders are in the church.

While serving as an associate pastor, I was helping the congregation build up the young adult ministry. I was working closely with one elder in the church, a young adult, and he continually shared his frustration about the church. He could not wait for his three years of service to finish. For him, it had been a horrible experience that he did not want to repeat.

After talking to a few other young adults in the congregation and asking them if they would serve on the session as an elder, I received similar responses. All of the young adults who had served were burned out by being on session and wanted nothing to do with serving again. There has to be a better way.

This frustration culminated when I was asked to take part in an all-day training session for elders that ended up looking like an all-day lecture. As the eyes of those newly elected officials rolled back as they were faced with one lecture after another, thoughts came to mind of “Isn’t there a better way?” This project is an attempt to find a better way.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are countless people who need to be thanked for the completion of this project, because there are so many people who have poured into my life as mentors and friends.

First and foremost is my mentor, Dr. Ken Swetland, for his encouragement and help through the process. His wisdom, experience, advice, and support have been unmatched. Thank you for stepping in and mentoring me through the process.

Dr. David Currie for creating and leading the Pastoral Skills track. The class has changed my life and my pastoring. God has used the program (and people in the program) to teach me and encourage me through the ups, downs, and craziness of ministry.

Dr. Bryan C. Auday was invaluable in advising me about the research methodology and the implementation of research aspect project.

Linda Triemstra Cook provided invaluable editing help. You helped me get the courage to start the process and continually encouraged me when I hit the “writer’s block” wall. You helped me push through and finish.

Over the years, my many mentors and friends have taught me how to pastor, how to be a friend, how to lead, and how to preach. Rev. Dr. Robert Fuller at Fairview took a chance on a young “want to be” ordained pastor, and Rev. Dr. William G. Katibah Jr. was my pastor who baptized, ordained, and at an early age showed me what ministry was about. I still remember how every birthday he cared enough to call and wish me a happy birthday.

Thanks to Glades Presbyterian Church for patience and understanding as I finished this process and completed my doctorate. Thank you to each and every one of you. I could not have done it without your love and support. Glades has shown Kristin and me such love. We greatly appreciate the way we have been accepted and loved by the congregation.

Dr. Kristin Robinson, my wife, supported me when I wanted more letters next to my name than she has. Thank you for your constant love and support.

Bob and Mary Robinson, my parents, taught me to be a lifelong learner.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore elder leadership in the Presbyterian Church. The study consists of a preliminary study looking at how many pastors have a training program for elders before they are ordained. Then the Bible will be explored, and the history, roles, expectations, and requirements of biblical elders are examined. The current literature on elder training is studied with heavy emphasis on denominational works. A study is conducted of six churches where the pastors are interviewed and the elders are surveyed online to determine if and how the elders are trained and the effectiveness of that training. Finally, these results will be examined.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE WORLD OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership “is the single fastest growing arena of publication in the USA,” according to Kleingartner.<sup>1</sup> People inherently understand that political systems, organizations, and institutions all depend on strong leadership; however, they also realize that leaders often fall short. Therefore, there is a leadership gap in culture, from the expectations of leaders to their actual practices. If this fact were not the case, there would not be such a surprising amount of literature about the topic of leadership. Not only is there so much literature, but also people like Jim Collins, Patrick Lencioni, and Dave Ramsey make millions of dollars in leadership consulting. Forbes says that “US spending on corporate training grew by 15% last year (the highest growth rate in seven years) to over \$70 billion in the US and over \$130 billion worldwide.”<sup>2</sup>

#### **Leadership in the Church**

Although leaders in the Christian church may share characteristics that mesh with the broader, more secular definitions, strong and effective lay leaders have a different standard of leadership grounded in faith in Jesus Christ and Christ’s example. As Bill Robinson observes, “I fear that those of us who lead Christian organizations have drawn

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<sup>1</sup> Connie Kleingartner, “How Shall We Train Church Leaders?” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 28, no. 1 (2001): 34-37.

<sup>2</sup> Josh Bersin, “Spending on Corporate Training Soars: Employee Capabilities Now a Priority,” February 4, 2014, accessed August 11, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2014/02/04/the-recovery-arrives-corporate-training-spend-skyrockets/>.



more from the texts of Harvard Business Review than from the leadership texts of Christ's life."<sup>3</sup>

The current trend in Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUSA) churches is to elect elders and then train them when they are elected. In a pilot study conducted in 2014 which surveyed sixty-one pastors of Presbyterian churches in the United States, only 18 percent of churches trained their leaders before electing them into office. Of the sixty-one pastors surveyed, only eleven said that their church had any type of intentional leadership training for people before they were elected into office. Responses from pastors about this study include comments such as "We so need to do that" and "I wish we trained leaders." Therefore, leadership gaps are observed in the church, just as they are in secular institutions.<sup>4</sup>

According to the PCUSA Book of Order, "As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in discernment of God's Spirit and governance of God's people. Accordingly, congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit."<sup>5</sup> Notice the language of that statement from the Book of Order; it says "having demonstrated," meaning that those elected are already demonstrating leadership skills, even though the obvious practice is leadership training once they are elected. The gap stands between what would be best practice to what is actually happening in the Presbyterian Church.

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<sup>3</sup> Bill Robinson. *Incarnate Leadership: 5 Leadership Lessons from the Life of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 18.

<sup>4</sup> The author of this project conducted a pilot study in February 2014 of Presbyterian pastors in South Carolina. These statements were given by pastors as they turned in their survey February 22 at the New Harmony Presbytery Meeting in Conway South Carolina.

<sup>5</sup> Book of Order, 2011-2013, annotated ed. (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2011), G-2.03.

These ruling elders of the congregation are called to “exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church, including ecumenical relationships.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the ruling elders need to be equipped to lead, teach, govern, and be upright in their lives, as demonstrated by the preceding data. This equipping is not currently done universally across the church. When equipping is done, it is not as effective as this thesis proposes it could and should be.

A group from the ECO/Fellowship of Presbyterians has taken notice of this leadership vacuum and has created the Elder Leadership Institute (ELI; for more about ECO, see the section The State of the Connected Church below). Their goal is to help develop and nurture elders into the biblical model of an elder. ELI’s mission is to “develop ruling elders to be spiritual leaders in the church through a three phase holistic program of teaching, practicums, spiritual disciplines and leadership opportunities.”<sup>7</sup> ELI is just getting started but seems to be addressing these issues and advancing positive leadership dynamics in the Presbyterian Church today. “ELI’s goal is transformation, not simply information.”<sup>8</sup> ELI is for those who have already been elected to session. The idea and goal of this thesis-project is that with earlier training, newly elected elders from day one will be effective, Christ-like leaders in the church. This thesis-project, however, will not create curriculum. This exploratory study will research what is the gap in leadership from what is expected to real-life practices and, therefore, it seeks to address the need to lay the groundwork for intentional training of first-time elders. The future hope is that pastors, churches, presbyteries, and denominations will use this data and information to

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<sup>6</sup> Book of Order, G-2.03.01.

<sup>7</sup> Elder Leadership Institute, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.elderleadership.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> Elder Leadership Institute.

see more clearly the issues of training lay elders and work toward creating programs and classes for nurturing leaders before they are elected into office.

There are resources for training elders, but nothing standardized or required. Each church and pastor is free and does or does not train leaders the way they want. A part of ELI's curriculum for elders includes *Spiritual Autobiography: Discovering and Sharing Your Spiritual Story* by Richard Peace and *Unleader: The Surprising Qualities of a Valuable Leader* by Jane Overstreet. The PCUSA webpage includes a list of resources and three books about training elders: *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* by Joan S. Gray; *Presbyterian Polity for Church Leaders* (4th ed.) by Joan S. Gray and Joyce C. Tucker; and *Selected to Serve: A Guide for Church Leaders* (2nd ed.) by Earl S. Johnson.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Local Church's Leadership**

Currently, I serve as a solo pastor of a small church of 115 members in West Boca Raton, Florida. It is a young church comparatively, of about twenty-five years. There are a few members still in the church who are charter members and therefore remember when the church started in the school right down the street. Those are the members who enjoy telling the stories of the sprinklers going off as the congregation celebrated one of its first Christmas Eve candlelight services outside (in South Florida, the winters are warm enough to have a candlelight service outside). Glades Presbyterian Church is a family church that is multigenerational and multiethnic. In my short tenure as the second

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<sup>9</sup> Office of The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA, "Helpful Resources," accessed August 11 2015, <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/ruling-elders/helpful-resources/>.

installed pastor of the church, the church has seen the birth of three babies, and many young families have joined the church.

As pastor of the church, my goal is to glorify Christ and to make the name of Christ known throughout our neighborhood, which is around eighteen hundred homes in the Logger's Run community.<sup>10</sup> Looking to the entire West Boca area there are many who do not know Jesus Christ. Early in ministry, I learned that I am only one person, God is in control, and as pastors we need to rely on and let God use the lay leaders of the church. Being good Presbyterians, our main leadership is the session, which is made up of the ruling elders (lay leaders) and the teaching elder (pastor) of the church.

Glades Presbyterian Church is my third ordained call, but my first opportunity to serve as pastor, meaning the head pastor. I have been serving the Lord through ordained ministry for nine years now in two other congregations, and before seminary I served churches in non-ordained youth director positions. Through my years in ministry, I have noticed that each church trains (or does not train) its ruling elders in many different ways: training from experience (i.e., no training, but letting them learn as they go) to three-hour classes five weeks in a row. There seems to be no consistency whatsoever in the training of the elders of the church. This is not an issue that is decided along theological lines between evangelical and liberal congregations (see the section The State of the Connected Church below.) I have served congregations that call themselves evangelical, and yet the diversity of their training for elders is vast.

Is there concern about the lay leadership of the Presbyterian Church compared with the leadership in Scripture? Jesus taught and mentored the disciples for three years

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<sup>10</sup> Loggers Run Community, accessed August 20, 2015, [http://www.loggersrun.com/loggersrun/sub\\_category\\_list.asp?category=9&title=Our+Communities](http://www.loggersrun.com/loggersrun/sub_category_list.asp?category=9&title=Our+Communities).

before he put them in roles of leadership in the church. Teaching elders (pastors) have that three-year training in seminary, but why don't ruling elders receive training to that extent? Or maybe the most important question to ask is why the church does not train potential leaders. Why are people not trained for leadership, and then and only then elected into the office of ruling elder of the church?

The driving force behind this thesis-project is the idea that the church needs to train ruling elders before they are elected into office. If the church would take the initiative to have well-trained leaders before they are elected, then the church would have more effective leadership, which in turn should lead to the church being more effective. This would be a dramatic change because there is currently no standard system in place to train ruling elders.

Training elders is the responsibility of the pastor of the local congregation. As stated above, there are resources from the PCUSA, and there are many resources that have been created by churches that are available online or by request from pastors.

### **A Young Pastor in the Twenty-First Century**

It is an interesting time to be a young pastor in the church in the twenty-first century. The church has seen so much change over the last fifty years. There is so much happening and still changing in the church: technology, worship styles, change of acceptance of seeming unbiblical beliefs, the loss of membership, and aging of the Presbyterian Church. These changes in the church and the aging of the congregation create a challenge for a young pastor in the church today. As a young pastor, I have a passion to see new generations come into the church. When younger generations come

into the church the church changes. Sometimes this creates conflict in the congregation and specifically conflict in leaders of the church, where some session members and elders have been doing things their way for fifty years and have no intention of changing them now. They wonder, why don't those young people just want to do things the way that we have always done them? This creates generational conflict.

On top of that, as a young pastor who has been ordained only nine years, I work with elders who have been in the church longer than I have been alive. Many of them have been a leader or an executive in a major company or a nonprofit for many years. Because of their vast leadership experience, these leaders are sometimes resistant to learning about church leadership because of their vast personal experience in their corporate or nonprofit positions. It is important to know why and how to train these experienced elders in their leadership position. This can be difficult especially for a younger pastor who is less experienced than the elder. However, knowing the difference between corporate and nonprofit leadership compared with Presbyterian Church leadership and helping the experienced leaders learn how to be biblical church elders is important.

### **The State of the Connected Church**

The PCUSA is a divided and splintering denomination. This has been going on since before I was in ministry. It will probably continue going on for many years. The most recent group leaving the PCUSA is a denomination called The Evangelical Covenant Order (ECO). Glades Presbyterian Church is a congregation that is currently committed to staying in the PCUSA. In the last few years, there have been a number of

churches from Tropical Florida Presbytery that have left the denomination for ECO. Most fellow pastors who theologically align with Glades Presbyterian Church have moved from the PCUSA to ECO. There is much bitterness and discourse between The Presbytery of Tropical Florida and the churches that have left the denomination for ECO. This is an unfortunate situation, because both groups are doing their best to glorify God. This project will not keep to one idea or the other but will be spread between the two denominations, drawing from ECO congregations as well as PCUSA congregations in South Florida. One of the great things about being Presbyterian is being connected. Being a part of a connected church lends itself to knowing and getting to know other pastors and churches. A church does not stand on its own, but it is connected to the churches in its presbytery. Therefore, it is important to connect to those churches around Glades Presbyterian Church, both in Tropical Florida Presbytery of the PCUSA and the ECO churches in the Presbytery of Florida. Leadership is not a denominational issue; it is not an evangelical, moderate, or liberal issue. It is an issue for all churches that are trying to follow Christ and be a light to a dark world.

### **Why Is Lay Leadership So Important?**

It is vital that Presbyterian churches have well-qualified and trained lay leaders because lay elders or ruling elders make up the leadership in the congregation and the entire denomination.

According to denominational research, membership in the PCUSA was 1,667,767 at the end of 2014.<sup>11</sup> According to a study done by The Presbyterian Panel, “Half of

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<sup>11</sup> Office of the General Assembly, accessed August 14, 2015, <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2015/5/12/pcusa-membership-lies-medium-sized-congregations/>.

members (51%) have previously been ordained as elders, deacons, or both.”<sup>12</sup> One sees that a large portion of the membership of the PCUSA has served in an elected office.

The Presbyterian churches are sometimes called middle of the way<sup>13</sup> because of their form of government. “Presbyterians are between the hierarchical system on the right and the congregational system on the left . . . Presbyterianism is a republican form of government, akin to that of the United States of America, whose Constitution was greatly influenced by Presbyterians.”<sup>14</sup> This form of government is a blessing, but it makes it imperative that those who are making the decisions (the ruling elders and teaching elders) are knowledgeable about what they need to be doing and can make informed decisions to lead the church.

The ruling body of the local congregation is the session. The session is made up of the ruling elders and the teaching elders of the church. Everyone has an equal vote, both ruling elders and teaching elders. Because sessions are made up of usually between seven (for smaller churches) and fifteen, twenty-one, or more than sixty ruling elders (for larger churches) and have only one teaching elder (for smaller churches) and three, four, or many more teaching elders (for larger churches), the lay leaders (the ruling elders) have more control or power over the local congregation than even the teaching elder does. (This excludes the fact that the teaching elder is the pastor and the pastor has

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<sup>12</sup> The Presbyterian Panel, accessed August 26, 2015, [https://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/research/pdfs/panel\\_profile\\_survey\\_2011\\_summary\\_color.pdf](https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/research/pdfs/panel_profile_survey_2011_summary_color.pdf). The Presbyterian Panel is a representative sample of nearly two thousand Presbyterians (members, ruling elders, pastors, and specialized ministers) who serve on the panel for a three-year period and respond to mailed questionnaires four times a year. This panel provides a way to listen to and collect information about the general practices, beliefs, and opinions of Presbyterians. For information about the Presbyterian Panel, email: Joelle Kopacz, Panel Administrator, <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/research/presbyterian-panel/>.

<sup>13</sup> Harry S. Hassall, *Presbyterianism's Unique Gift: Ordained Lay Elders* (Brentwood, TN: Middle Way Ministries, 1999), 98.

<sup>14</sup> Hassall, *Presbyterianism's Unique Gift*, 47.



positional power but can easily be outvoted by the session if the session disagrees with the pastor.)

The next level of Presbyterian government is the presbytery. At this level the body is made up of near-equal numbers of both ruling elders and teaching elders, each having a vote. The final level of government for the PCUSA is the General Assembly (GA). Just like the presbytery level, the GA has equal representations of both ruling elders and teaching elders.

According to The Presbyterian Panel, not only are the elders the church leaders by position of being on the session, but they are also leaders in church attendance, Bible reading, outreach, and tithing in the congregation.<sup>15</sup>

With so much leadership coming from the lay people in the Presbyterian Church, it is vital that pastors and churches not be haphazard or use shortcuts in training such important leaders in the life of the church.

### **Statement of Research Topic**

Training sessions for elders are available online for churches and presbyteries; books can be read by elders; and every church has a system for training its elders. The question is: Do the trainings and readings correspond to the lack in leadership and work to fill the gap of leadership? Further, has anyone taken the time to study what is expected in leadership and where the gap really is? Do many churches use the resources available? Do the majority of churches spend time training their elder leaders?

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<sup>15</sup> The Presbyterian Panel, accessed August 26, 2015, [https://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/research/pdfs/panel\\_profile\\_survey\\_2011\\_summary\\_color.pdf](https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/research/pdfs/panel_profile_survey_2011_summary_color.pdf).

Therefore, this thesis-project will be an exploratory study in the leadership formation of first-term session members in Presbyterian churches. The study will analyze roles and expectations compared with actual leadership practices. The goal is to find the gap between expectations and reality so that future studies can put together curriculum to train elders.

To guide this study, three research questions will be explored:

RQ1: What is the biblical foundation of the role of an elder in the church?

RQ2: What is the traditional role of Presbyterian elders throughout historical and current literature?

RQ3: What are the current practices of training for Presbyterian elders?

When the biblical foundation of the roles of elders in the church is established, the second research question will explore heavily the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church USA,<sup>16</sup> *Selected to Serve*,<sup>17</sup> *The Presbyterian Ruling Elder*,<sup>18</sup> *Presbyterianism's Unique Gift*,<sup>19</sup> and other products from the PCUSA.

Exploring the third research question will entail looking at specific churches and how they train elders and what they expect from their elders. This will give a framework of comparison for what is expected for the role of elder.

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<sup>16</sup> Book of Order, 2011-2013.

<sup>17</sup> Earl S. Johnson Jr., *Selected to Serve: A Guide for Church Officers*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 20120).

<sup>18</sup> Paul S. Wright, *The Presbyterian Ruling Elder: An Essential Guide*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Hassall, *Presbyterianism's Unique Gift*.

## **Research Methods**

The research for this project will include five Presbyterian churches, both PCUSA and ECO churches, in South Florida. Separate surveys will be sent to pastors of these churches and to their elder leaders. The surveys to the pastors will explore what type of leadership training (if any) they have for their elders, how long that training is, what resources are used in the training, and when that training takes place in relationship to elders' election, ordination, and service.

The surveys to the elders will explore their perspective on the training they received (if they received any), how well they were trained, the extent of the training, if the expectations of being an elder were fully explained before they accepted the position, if their expectations were fully explained after the training before they held the office, or if they even now know the expectations of being an elder of the church after training.

The second part to the research will be a follow-up time of semi-structured interviews with a handful of the pastors and elders surveyed. These semi-structured interviews will include more narrative data and questions that are not included on the initial surveys.

Therefore, this thesis research will be a mixed study in which both quantitative data (from the surveys) and qualitative data (from the semi-structured interviews) are obtained.

When the data have been collected, there will be a picture of what is currently going on in the Presbyterian Church as pertains to the training of lay elders.

The final aspect of this thesis will be examining the data gathered and comparing it with what was learned during the phase of biblical research and literature research. The

next task is proposing what could be done differently to better equip and train elders in the Presbyterian Church.

The goal of this project is to help churches and pastors know what is missing in first-time elder training in order that they might better prepare the lay leaders of the Presbyterian Church. When this study is complete, pastors, presbyteries, and denominational leaders should be able to read this paper and be guided in creating curriculum and courses to help prepare lay elders for their ministry in the church and on the session. One hopes that as a church, there will be efforts made to train future leaders and prepare them for lay leadership roles in the church and therefore create a large pool to pull from for electing the ruling elders of the church. Having intentional leadership training before lay elders are elected will mean future changes will occur in the Presbyterian Church because the church will have stronger leaders, starting in the local congregation and going all the way up through the General Assembly.

Now that the problem has been defined, a way to study and research the gap in leadership has been proposed. The first step is to explore the biblical principles of elder leadership. The following chapter will delve more deeply into biblical principles and what the Bible says about elder leadership.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In chapter 1 the need was established for elder leaders in the church. It was also proposed that a gap exists between what is hoped for and expected in elder leadership and what is taking place. This chapter will explore what the Bible says about what it means to be an elder or a leader in the church. This study will consider what it means to be an elder, the qualifications for an elder, the expectations of elders, and the history of elders in the Bible and beyond. Asquith frames the progression:

If we go back no further than Pentecost to locate the first New Testament church, the group that gathered following the inspired preaching of Peter and his companions on that wondrous day in Jerusalem described in Acts 2, we shall find that there were no church officers—unless the preaching of the day might be called an officer—and no duties. Where there is nothing to be done, workers are not needed. That first church had no roll of members as yet, with names and street addressed to be kept up-to-date, no bank account to be kept balanced, no bills to be paid, no buildings to be maintained. But as the months and years went on, of course, that church found one problem of administration after another, and each had to be solved. One by one, church officers were created to meet needs as they arose. This, also, is the basis accepted by churches today: the need coupled with the simplest and most efficient way of caring for it.<sup>1</sup>

#### The History of Elders

The word זָקֵן (*zā-qēn*) in the Old Testament means “elder; dignitary; old person; a leader in the community that makes religious, social, and leadership decisions.”<sup>2</sup> Elders truly were all of the above and were the leaders of the early communities in the Hebrew culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Glenn H. Asquith, *Church Officers at Work*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1977), 1.

<sup>2</sup> R. Whitaker, F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, from *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1906), electronic ed., accessed October 22, 2015.

The concept of elders as leaders is carried out throughout the Old Testament. The first time the word *elder* is used in the Old Testament, it describes those in leadership in Israel: “Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt”’” (Exod 3:16).<sup>3</sup> The same word is used repeatedly throughout Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Numbers to talk about the elders of Israel. These elders

held a rank among the people indicative of authority. Moses opened his commission to them (Ex. 3:16). They attended Moses on all important occasions. Seventy of them attended on him at the giving of the law (Ex. 24:1). Seventy also were selected from the whole number to bear with Moses the burden of the people (Num. 11:16, 17). The “elder” is the keystone of the social and political fabric wherever the patriarchal system exists. At the present day this is the case among the Arabs, where the sheik (i.e., “the old man”) is the highest authority in the tribe. The body of the “elders” of Israel were the representatives of the people from the very first, and were recognized as such by Moses. All down through the history of the Jews we find mention made of the elders as exercising authority among the people. They appear as governors (Deut. 31:28), as local magistrates (16:18), administering justice (19:12). They were men of extensive influence (1 Sam. 30:26–31). In New Testament times they also appear taking an active part in public affairs (Matt. 16:21; 21:23; 26:59).<sup>4</sup>

As is shown by the preceding comments about Deuteronomy and Numbers, the term *elder* also include elders of cities and states outside of Israel. A representative passage is Numbers 22:7, which says, “So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand. And they came to Balaam and gave him Balak’s message.”

It was common practice throughout the ancient Near East for each city to have elders who helped rule, govern, and judge. In Israel, this fact is demonstrated in the

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

<sup>4</sup> M. G. Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), electronic ed., accessed October 22, 2015.

material about the law, specifically Numbers 21–22, and throughout the book of Judges. An example of the elders serving as judges is Ruth 4:1-2: “Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, “Turn aside, friend; sit down here.’ And he turned aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, ‘Sit down here.’ So they sat down.” Boaz called together ten elders to take care of a legal transaction: who would be the kinsman redeemer of Ruth.

In the ruins of the city of Dan in northern Israel, one can still see the seats where the elders sat at the gates of the city. The concept of the elders sitting at the gates to judge has been backed up by archaeological discoveries.

Strauch picks up on this argument: “Leadership by a council of men called elders predated the synagogue and was very familiar to the Jews and to all readers of the Greek Old Testament. The council of elders was one of Israel’s oldest and most fundamental institutions. It was nearly as basic as the family.”<sup>5</sup> He continues, “Elders, with delegated powers, were authorized to act for their constituency.”<sup>6</sup>

Elders were active in Jewish society: “Israel’s elders were not mere figureheads. Although there is no explanation of their origin, appointment, or qualifications, Israel’s elders are mentioned approximately one hundred times in the Old Testament. Their vital leadership role is displayed by their active involvement in every crucial event in Israel’s history.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, rev. and expanded. ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995), 122.

<sup>6</sup> James Swanson and O. Nave, *The New Nave’s Topical Bible*, rev. and expanded by James Swanson (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1994), electronic ed., accessed October 22, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 122.

Israel's history does not end in the Old Testament, however. Even in New Testament times, the traditions of early biblical times were still in place. New concepts of elders were evolving during the time of Christ Jesus. "At the time of Christ, there were local and national Jewish elders. . . . Exactly who these local elders were and what their relationship to the synagogue was, however, we don't know."<sup>8</sup> Even though the New Testament description of the elders in the synagogue is not flattering, the existence of such leaders could be associated with the move to elders in the church.

Campbell agrees and makes the connection with leaders in the New Testament. "The use of the word 'elders' to denote the leaders of a community of some kind has long Jewish history behind it by the time we meet it in the emerging church of the New Testament. At all periods of Israelite and Jewish history down to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, and in all sizes of community, we find leadership being exercised by those to whom this title is applied."<sup>9</sup>

The Greek πρεσβύτερος (*presbyteros*) means "old man; an elder, community leader."<sup>10</sup> The definition is similar to that of the Old Testament term, but this term implies that the elders were religious leaders in the Old Testament. Moving into the New Testament times it is clear that the elders are the leaders of the synagogue (Matt 16:21; 21:23).

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<sup>8</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 122.

<sup>9</sup> R. Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority Within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 20.

<sup>10</sup> James Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997, 2001), accessed October 22, 2015.



Jesus continually challenged the leadership and authority of the elders of the temple and synagogue. When Jesus talked about elders, he spoke about those who held tight control of the Jewish temple faith and who would persecute him (as seen above).

There is a gap in the view of elder leadership from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The Old Testament elders are viewed primarily in a positive light and as good leaders of the people. In the New Testament, this has changed. The elders are now seen as part of the Jewish leadership that opposes and persecutes Jesus Christ.

The book of Acts is where the concept of elders changes; these leaders are now known as elders of the Christian church (see Acts 11:30; 14:23 for examples of these elders). “The church is a continuation, in a new form, of what the nation of Israel was before Jesus’ coming (see, for example, Romans 11:17, Galatians 6:16). Then government by Elders in the Church is simply a continuation of the kind of government that existed previously in Israel.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, the early church elders were more similar to the Old Testament elders than to the New Testament synagogue elders. The basic leadership and government had not changed drastically throughout this entire time.

### **Early Leadership in the Church**

Leadership in the early church was not held exclusively by elders. First we must consider the disciples, apostles, and missionaries (Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and Luke are examples). “At the beginning, the twelve apostles were the official overseers of the Christian community. But at an early, unrecorded date, a body of elders emerges that was fully recognized by the congregation and the apostles as leaders of the community. It is

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<sup>11</sup> Dr. Bob Fuller, Officer Training, session 3, page 6.

commonly thought that the first Christians borrowed the elder structure of government from the synagogue.”<sup>12</sup>

Strauch goes on to say that even though the term “elder” was used in the early Christian church, it is very different from the elders in the synagogue and relates more to the Old Testament council of elders in Israel.<sup>13</sup> These elders were both religious and city leaders (see the section The History of Elders).

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:28, “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.” These positions are not created by people for the people. They are created by God, the head (Jesus Christ) of the church, and put in place by him.

### **Are Elders the Same as Overseers?**

Paul uses many terms when he speaks about leaders in the early church. Utley comments, “The term ‘elders’ (*presbuteros*) is synonymous with the terms ‘bishop’ (*episkopos*) and ‘pastors’ in the NT. The term ‘elder’ has a Jewish background . . . while the term ‘bishop’ or ‘overseer’ has a Greek city-state background. There are only two church officers: pastors and deacons (cf. Phil. 1:1).”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 121.

<sup>13</sup> Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 122.

<sup>14</sup> Bob Utley, professor of hermeneutics (biblical interpretation), *You Can Understand the Bible! Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, Study Guide Commentary Series New Testament, vol. 3B, Bible Lessons International (Marshall, TX, 2003), [www.BibleLessonsIntl.com](http://www.BibleLessonsIntl.com), accessed on Logos Bible Software. For the Jewish background of the term “elder,” Utley refers readers to R. B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, 244–46, and Frank Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, 262–64.

The terms “elder,” “deacon,” and “overseer” (or bishop) are used 75 times in the New Testament. The term “apostle” is used 70 times in the New Testament; therefore leaders in the church are mentioned more than 150 times.

The Pastoral Epistles were written to the early church while it was trying to understand its identity. These epistles place expectations on elders in the church, so this is an appropriate time to teach about this new position in the church. (As we have seen, the position is historical, but as the early church was new, everything about the church was new.)

### **Qualifications of Early Church Elders**

Leadership in the early church included more persons than just the elders (see the section Are Elders the Same as Overseers?). But that raised questions about who can assume a leadership position and what the qualifications are for those positions. Certain passages (1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17-25; Tit 1:6-9; 1 Pet 5:1-4) make clear the expectations for elders.

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Tim 3:1-7)

“1 Timothy 3:1 calls the work of the elder ‘a noble task.’ One implication of this verse is that to be an elder is to be engaged in work and not merely to hold an office or achieve a certain status. The work of the elder is, however, a work of honor, a noble task,

in the kingdom of God.”<sup>15</sup> The qualifications set out in Titus 1:6-9 are very similar, reiterating that an elder must be

the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Added to these essential qualifications are instructions for how elders are to conduct themselves:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden. (1 Tim 5:17-25; v. 23 applied specifically to Timothy)

And from one of Jesus’ original twelve disciples comes this advice:

To the Elders and the Flock

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Pet 5:1-4, New International Version)

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<sup>15</sup> Donald J. MacNair, *The Challenge of the Eldership: A Handbook for the Elders of the Church* (Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications, 1984), 7.

Jesus, in his instructions to his disciples, says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, New International Version). Peter merges the fact of his witness with the role of elder. He also emphasizes that elders are shepherds of the flock.

Both of these concepts have deep roots in Jewish history. Can leadership be as simple as taking care of sheep?<sup>16</sup> Jesus echoes this thought as he reinstates Peter (John 21:15-19). Jesus asks if Peter loves him. Each time when Peter says yes, Jesus asks Peter to take a shepherding role: “Feed my lambs,” “Tend my sheep,” and “Feed my sheep.”<sup>17</sup>

In an attempt to be more specific about the qualifications laid out in Scripture, Harry S. Hassall has a Bible study on 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, and 1 Peter 5:1-4. In these sections Hassall identifies thirty-two qualities that the Bible says elders must have.<sup>18</sup> This is an exhaustive list, and volumes can be written about it. For the purposes of this project, that list will be broken down into three major categories and discussed that way. These major categories are faith, family, and lifestyle characteristics. Some of these qualities do not fit squarely into a category and many of them could fit into all three of the categories, but this categorization is a method of bringing them into discussion.

Benjamin L. Merkle also discusses the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1; he says, “For the most part, the qualifications given seem to be listed in random order. The one exception is that both lists begin with the qualifications of being ‘above

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<sup>16</sup> This statement does not mean that shepherding is simple but instead that the simple idea of caring for the sheep might be a glimpse of the main expectations of the elder leader.

<sup>17</sup> See Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks: Reflections on Biblical Leadership* (Charlotte, NC: ShepherdLeader Publications, 2007); ShepherdLeader.com.

<sup>18</sup> Harry S. Hassall, *Presbyterianism's Unique Gift: Ordained Lay Elders* (Brentwood, TN: Middle Way Ministries, 1999), 22-24.

reproach' and 'the husband of one wife' (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6). These requirements can be divided into situational, family, and moral qualifications."<sup>19</sup> Even though Merkle uses situational, family, and moral qualifications, for this project the three categories used will be faith, family, and lifestyle.<sup>20</sup>

## Faith

Faith, specifically faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, is required for any elder of the church. This is mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:13: "great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus." Every elder needs to be grounded in sound faith in Jesus Christ.

The second part of Faith is that the elder must "must not be a recent convert" (1 Tim 3:6). Paul gives the reason for this immediately by saying that they "may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil." Someone who has recently become a follower of Jesus Christ has excitement, no doubt. Even though such recent converts may be excited about their new faith in Jesus Christ, Paul makes it clear that it can be dangerous to have recent converts serving as elders of the church. The disciples spent three years being mentored by Jesus; throughout that time they showed they did not understand Jesus, to the point even where Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind

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<sup>19</sup> Benjamin L. Merkle, *Why Elders?: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), 67.

<sup>20</sup> As these qualifications of elders are discussed, it is important to differentiate between these lists and the lists of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were listed exactly the same way in two places. These lists of qualifications for elders are different from the Ten Commandments because they are listed in different places and are not listed exactly the same in each place. This indicates that these are not commands like the Ten Commandments. This idea would also give light to the idea a qualification is weighted more heavily because it is in all three lists. The concept of what is required compared with where it is acceptable if an elder is not all of these is a huge discussion on which volumes could be written. The author of this thesis recognizes that much more could be said and explained here, but for the scope of this thesis-project, the gap will be focused on roles and responsibilities of the elders. It would also be an interesting project in itself to study how pastors and elders view these characteristics and how the elders and pastors live up to these standards. That study would focus more on these characteristics than this project does.

me, Satan!” (Matt 16:23). It is important to take time to mentor new believers into the mature believers that Christians are called to be. Paul also writes, “So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:14-15). Christians are called to not stay as infant believers but to mature into adult believers. Paul is saying in 1 Timothy that elders should be those mature believers.

Three other topics go along with having a mature faith. The first two are mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:9: “They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience,” and 1 Timothy 3:10: “let them also be tested first.” Both holding the mystery of the faith and being tested are part of becoming a mature believer. It could be said that a mature believer is not a mature believer until he or she has been tested and shown to have a clear conscience with the faith. The third topic related to being a mature Christian comes in Titus 1:8: “upright, holy, and disciplined.” Being upright, holy, and disciplined come from a mature faith in Jesus Christ. Holiness, or being set apart, comes with discipline and maturing of faith. Becoming disciplined is the same: it takes a believer maturing in Christ.

Being mature in faith is a key element of being an elder. It has been stated many ways in these two Scripture passages, a fact that indicates the importance of mature faith. This mature faith will present itself in one who is upright, holy, disciplined, having faith with a clear conscience, and tested. All of these qualities take time and require a believer to be an adult in his or her faith.

Another characteristic of faith is described in 1 Timothy 3:7: “He must be well

thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”

The concept of being thought of well by outsiders is not discussed much. But the idea is an important one. Merkle says, “Outsiders, or non-Christians, often seem to be better judges of character than those in the church.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore it is important to learn what outsiders say about those who want to become elders. This has to do with how we live; are we living out our faith in the world so that others can see it?

“Therefore an overseer must be . . . able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2). Along with the concept of faith itself and having a mature faith, Paul tells Timothy, elders must be able to teach. This does not mean that elders are to be school teachers but that elders need to be mature enough in their faith so that they can teach the faith to others. All Christians should be able to teach the faith to those younger in the faith than they are. Today that does not seem prevalent. However, it seems that the ability to teach did not always happen in the early church, either, and therefore Paul had to tell Timothy that the elders needed to be able to teach. This shows that elder leadership should not just be a position of power or a position of authority, but the elders of the church need to lead in teaching discipleship. First Peter 5:3 adds to this thought of leading by teaching and by “being examples to the flock.” Elders in essence are discipling believers through teaching and through how they live their everyday lives.

“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Tit 1:8). Titus is told that in order to be able to teach, the elder must first know the Word (Bible), and from the Bible the elder is to teach sound doctrine. But there is a step further here: in addition to teaching the Bible (sound doctrine), the elder also is to be able to use the

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<sup>21</sup> Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 69.



Scripture to rebuke those who contradict it. This passage suggests a three-step progression: knowing the Bible, being able to teach the Bible, and being able to rebuke those who contradict the Bible. Paul is telling Titus that the elders need to be spiritually mature enough to do all three things. The elder can rebuke those who contradict Scripture with words but also through their lives.

The last aspect of the faith required of an elder comes in why someone should serve as elder. First and foremost elders must through faith understand that “if anyone aspires to the office or overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim 3:1). This sets the tone for the elder. The office of elder is not something that should be entered into lightly, or taken lightly. This continues the idea that someone should be mature in faith before taking on the responsibility. The concept of a noble task would indicate that those seeking to be elders in the church are themselves held to higher standards or noble standards. This does not mean that they are spineless or perfect or higher than everyone else; they need to hold themselves to higher standards.

Along with the concept of eldership as a noble task, 1 Timothy 3:8 says that they should be “not greedy for dishonest gain.” This speaks to the issue of motives. Motives must be honest, because elders are called by God to serve, feel that call on their heart, and are affirmed by the congregation. These motives come from a mature faith.

First Peter 5:1-4 focuses on the faith of serving and why one serves as an elder. The keys expressed are “not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering . . . but being examples to the flock . . . you will receive the unfailing crown of glory.” These are all important faith traits to have as elders prepare for office. This passage speaks to why people are choosing to

serve. As Paul said to Timothy, elders should serve because they are called, not because they are forced into serving. This calling means that God wants the elder to serve. Elders are called to lead and be examples (which was previously discussed). This is when people should serve, when they feel God is calling them to serve. If they serve for any other reason they are doing it for dishonest gain, even if they are being pushed into doing for the church. First Peter goes further than the other passages in saying there is a reward for serving: a “crown of glory.” If elders serve for this crown of glory, they are showing spiritual maturity because this crown is not an earthly crown. Instead, the person is thinking beyond this life to glory with God, which is what God wants us to think of and plan for. This is in contrast to the elder who serves for earthly power and gain, which shows a worldly view.

### Family Life

Scripture describes how an elder’s family life must be. An elder must be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2); “he must manage his household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?”<sup>22</sup> (1 Tim 4:5-6). Paul, writing to Titus, adds “the husband to one wife, and . . . [whose children are believers,] not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination” (Tit 1:6) These are hard qualifications to follow, and if these rules are hard and fast, there might not be any elders who can serve in the church today. Being “the husband of one wife” can mean not being in a polygamous

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<sup>22</sup> There could be much discussion on this topic of the husband of one wife and children must obey. The author does not think this means that an elder must be married with children. There is a realization that there are different understandings and issues depending on the situation: a married couple may be unable to have children; a single person; someone in another country who has multiple wives. The author realizes there is much debate and many ideas about this. See footnote 20 above.

relationship, but it can also mean remarriage is out of the question for elders. Paul goes on to say that the household must be managed well, including training children so that they are also believers; Paul in writing to Titus says the children of an elder cannot be charged with debauchery or insubordination, which means that an elder's children must be believers and live a sexually pure life and be obedient to the Lord.

In addition, Paul is talking specifically to men, and some people interpret that to mean only men can be elders. The PCUSA and ECO have both accepted women as elders, but they have also affirmed that women are an important part of the church and are called by God to serve as elders. The church today rests heavily on grace; even though elders might not live up to all of these standards, the grace of God abounds and as the elders (male or female) strive to become spiritually mature and good spiritual guides in their own households, God can also use them to lead the church. It is important to think about that one passage again: “for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” Maybe this is the heart of what Paul is trying to say: elders must strive and work toward being good spiritual guides of the household first. When they have proved that they can lead in their house, then that shows a level of spiritual maturity.

### Lifestyle Characteristics

The character of an elder can be summed up in the phrase “above reproach” (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:6). That means they need to be so upright in their actions that no accusations are possible; everyone who knows what they are like and if they hear a story about bad behavior, they would not believe it. That is quite a standard to live up to, but it

is connected to eldership being a noble task. Paul lists specific expectations: “sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable . . . not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome” (1 Tim 3:2-3) and “not be arrogant, or quick tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled” (Tit 1:7-8). Again, this is a hard list, and one thanks the Lord for grace.

Four characteristics—self-controlled, hospitable, not a drunkard, and not violent—are mentioned in Timothy and Titus, so it will be assumed that they are very important.

*Self-controlled.* Is an elder able to control himself or herself? This would include being able to control anger and control one’s speech by not saying wrong things, gossiping, and spreading rumors. This trait is all-encompassing; it applies to the entirety of elders’ lives—whether they live a life that is regulated by and lived for Jesus Christ. It means elders do not do things that put them or the church in any danger, or the reputation of them or the church in any danger. This would also encompass the balance of life of the elders: they have control over their work life, their home life, and their church life.

*Hospitable.* Merriam Webster defines “hospitable” as “given to generous and cordial reception of guests; promising or suggesting generous and cordial welcome; offering a pleasant or sustaining environment; readily receptive.” By definition this is a characteristic that describes people who welcome others. Like Christ, who welcomes us into relationship with him, the elders need to welcome all and encourage others by their example.

*Not a drunkard.* Ephesians 5:8 is specific that someone should not get drunk. Being drunk lends itself to all other types of lifestyles and characteristics that do not honor Jesus Christ. Moreover, our human bodies are temples, and drunkenness abuses

they body. Nevertheless, drinking too much and drunkenness are epidemic in the United States.

For elders it is important to be above reproach and to honor Jesus Christ. Drunkenness can damage the example that elders are to set. In addition, people who are addicted to alcohol are not at the top of their game and are in need of help. The good news is that people can get help, recover, and become good candidates for elders in the church. But the time of recovery and healing is not the best time for someone to serve as an elder.

*Not violent but gentle.* When Peter resorted to violence at Jesus' arrest, Jesus resorting to his typical actions of healing and love. We are called to "put away our swords" and follow Christ.

*Sober minded.* Being sober minded comes with wisdom and being able to make wise choices. Being able to choose the right thing to do over the wrong thing is key in being a mature believer in Jesus Christ. Growing from doing whatever feels good to what Scripture teaches about how to live and act shows a sober mind.

*Respectable.* This characteristic would also go along with respected by outsiders. But respect comes from living for Christ and following the laws laid down, and these many characteristics that are given in Scripture.

*Not quarrelsome.* From a spiritual perspective, a quarrelsome heart is not a heart set upon Jesus Christ. From a logistic perspective, having someone who is quarrelsome to sit on a board is not a good idea.

*Not arrogant.* Christ teaches through his example that humility is the way to live. Arrogance is the opposite of humility. Arrogance on a board leads to quarrels.

*Not quick-tempered.* This is similar to being sober minded. A quick temper is said to get people in trouble (and is commonly connected to being quick to speak). Christ calls us to be patient and kind. Human nature is sinful; therefore, humans need to think before responding so that they do not respond out of their sinful nature but from the example of Jesus Christ.

*Not greedy.* “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matt 6:24). Money is a faith issue. Elders’ faith needs to be in Jesus, not money. They also need to be “lay[ing] up for [themselves] treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt 6:20).

In these passages the Bible talks about qualifications for leadership in the church. The truth is that no one is perfect except Christ alone, so none of us are ever going to be perfect. Therefore it is impossible to find elders who fulfill perfectly all the requirements for leadership. But elders need to realize that leadership is a noble task and strive to be more Christ-like as they grow into greater maturity as believers. These are the goals they are striving towards. These qualifications may temporarily limit and keep persons from serving as elders, at least until they are ready. But the grace of Jesus Christ can transform the hardest heart and transform people into the children of God that they are called to be. So the limitation is until that person is ready and more mature in faith, more like Christ.

These qualifications should be taken very seriously, talked about by nominating committees, and discussed with current and possible elders. The session should be reminded of its high calling and that it needs to strive continually to be more Christ-like. The qualities that have been discussed are reminders of what it means to be Christ-like.

The key to being an elder is to have a mature faith in Jesus Christ. Though time and maturing, one hopes these characteristics will develop and become more natural. It may be these characteristics develop because one's faith in Christ matures, or as one grows and follows these characteristics, faith in Christ matures. Either way, these characteristics can be cultivated and grow.

### **The Tasks of Early Church Elders**

It should be assumed that first and foremost elders are disciples of Jesus Christ and are already walking with their Lord and Savior. This concept of being a disciple of Jesus Christ comes with some expectations, but they will not be discussed, as the scope of this project is on elders. Many volumes have been written about discipleship, and further writing could fill many more volumes.

Two preceding passages, 1 Peter 5:1-4 and Acts 1:8, note that witness and love are among the tasks of elders. Jesus is explicit: Love is an essential task of a leader in the church. If leaders do not love Christ and love the ones they are serving, then leadership is lacking.

Prayer and the ministry of the word were considered crucial from the earliest times of the church, as Acts 6:2-4 (New International Version) attests:

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

Preaching and teaching (i.e., ministry of the Word of God) were so important to the early church that the Twelve did not want to be distracted from them. Instead, they appointed deacons to care for the people<sup>23</sup> and devoted themselves to preaching, teaching, and the ministry of prayer. That means that these three things are vital to the church, and leaders need to focus on them.

In addition to witnessing, loving, preaching, and teaching, prayer is an important part of elder leadership in the church, as James makes clear: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14).

The elders in Jerusalem also dealt with offerings and gifts. Multiple times through Paul’s missionary journeys it is mentioned that offerings were being taken up (Galatians 2:10, Romans 15:26, 1 Corinthians 16, and 2 Corinthians 8:1–9). Acts 11:30 culminates these gifts and has them ending up in the hands of the elders in Jerusalem. “And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.”

One major responsibility of elders is dealing with doctrinal issues. Titus is told by Paul that elders should be able to teach but also rebuke those who teach false doctrine (Tit 1:9). Elders are expected to oppose and silence those who oppose Christ (especially those who preach works of the flesh), teach good doctrine, be obedient, and do good works (see the section below about Paul’s teaching in his letter to Titus). In Ephesians, Paul exhorted the elders to guard both themselves and the church.

The elders of the church also had a key role in the Jerusalem Council. In Acts 15, one party of believers taught that people had to be circumcised in order to be saved, so

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<sup>23</sup> Care for the poor and widows, an important responsibility, was delegated to the deacons in the early church.



the council of apostles and elders met in Jerusalem to discuss if this was true or not. Multiple times in Acts 15 “the apostles and elders”<sup>24</sup> are mentioned together. Two things are shown through this. First, the elders of the early church, along with the disciples, decided the doctrine of the church. This is a key turning point in the faith: Gentile converts did not have to become Jews in order to follow Christ, and the elders were there along with the apostles making that decision. Second, after making this decision, the apostles and elders had the authority to send this doctrine throughout the church. Therefore, they sent Paul, Barnabas, Barsabbas, and Silas to share this declaration during their missionary journeys.

In Acts 20:18-35, Paul’s speech to the Ephesians elders is a virtual manual for pastor elders. It is the only record of Paul speaking directly to elders. It records his final words of exhortation and warning to the church elders, providing a dramatic description of who they are and what they are called by God to do. In short, this sermon provides us with an excellent synopsis of the uniquely Pauline, Christianized teaching on church elders.<sup>25</sup>

The PCUSA has two offices of elder, teaching elder and ruling elder. The teaching elders are the pastors, and the ruling elders are the lay elders elected from the congregation. In the next chapter this concept will be explored more, but some comment is needed here. In Acts, the Twelve appointed deacons so they could focus on teaching, preaching, and prayer. Acts says nothing about electing deacons so they could focus on ruling. It seems that in the early church, elders were leaders who taught, preached, and

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<sup>24</sup> Acts 15:4, 6, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Straugh, *Biblical Eldership*, 140.

prayed. It would therefore be assumed that elders in the church today should be able to teach, preach, and pray.<sup>26</sup>

### **Election and Ordination of Early Church Elders**

Elders are selected from among those who are “blameless” and who keep to a certain standard. In 1 Timothy 5:22 Paul says that elders should not be selected hastily. Ordination is by laying on of hands, as is seen with the deacons in Acts and continues throughout Scripture.

### **Elders Are Humble**

Jesus spent three years training the early leaders of the church, and all of his teaching should be applied to the leadership of the church. Through his actions (John 13) and words (echoed by Paul in Philippians 2) he taught humility in leadership. When the mother of two disciples makes a bold request, Jesus’ response is striking:

Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

“What is it you want?” he asked.

She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”

“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”

“We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with

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<sup>26</sup> From what we have explored in this chapter, it seems the distinction between teaching and ruling elders is not supported by the biblical texts. Perhaps this practice resulted from what was happening in the PCUSA. Because of that, maybe the PCUSA encourages or allows elders not to preach, teach, and pray, as the Bible has taught them to do.

you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matt 20:20-28)

Leadership is not inherited but is earned through hard work seen by all and through humility as taught and lived by Jesus Christ. As leadership is discussed, power can easily be implied by position or by role, but leadership is more than power.

Leadership is the ability to lead others by the example of one’s life. This is the type of leaders Jesus was training his disciples to be. This is the type of leaders Jesus wants the leaders of his church to be.

Jesus notes that the key characteristic of leadership is servanthood: in order to be a great leader, one must first be a servant. Jesus contradicts directly what is expected in leadership and power. The brothers were looking to what they could gain by being a disciple of Jesus, but Jesus teaches about humility. In Titus Paul tells Titus that leaders are to teach sound doctrine, and must hold firm to the trustworthy words as taught. A key for the elders in Crete Paul was telling Titus about was to be above reproach. The Character of an elder was key. Servanthood and character, not power, define what it means to be an elder.

### **Elders in Revelation (Future Elders)**

Elders were first mentioned in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament. They are also mentioned in the final book of the Bible, Revelation, showing what the role of elders will be in heaven.

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” And the twenty-four elders who

sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.” (Rev 7: 15-18)

What can the twenty-four elders in Revelation teach about biblical eldership?

They are “rulers” under God in heaven. Great rulers follow Christ, and these elders are examples of humility. It appears that their main goal in heaven is to worship and glorify God. Many times in the church today, leaders and elders can be caught up in the business aspects of the church. If the business side of things is not taken care of, then ministry cannot happen. If power bills are not paid, there are no lights for worship. But Revelation reminds us that humankind’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.<sup>27</sup> Elders need to keep their focus on God all of the time. Church leadership is different from secular leadership because it is about the Lord Jesus Christ and his church. The idea that the elders should constantly worship God would change the way church leadership is viewed if that was made the focus of the elders of the church all the time.

### **John Calvin and Elders**

John Calvin, one of the early reformers of the church, attempted to create what he considered biblical elders. He worked hard to change or reform what it meant to be an elder in the church.

The offices of elder and deacon were what made Calvin’s understanding and practice of the plural ministry special and unique. In the medieval period, these officers were part and parcel of the ministry of the clergy. With Calvin it became clear that these were lay ministries set up separately from the office of the Word and sacrament. In reality, however, despite Calvin’s wish, the office of elder in Geneva seemed to operate more or less like that of Christian magistrates in

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<sup>27</sup> Westminster Catechism.

Zurich, who attempted to take control of both civil and ecclesiastical jurisdictions. It was only in 1561 that a syndic, the president of the Consistory, was enjoined not to bring his baton, the symbol of his political position, to the Consistory but to perform his job purely as an elder.<sup>28</sup>

Calvin's concept of the offices of elder and deacon has led to where the Presbyterian Church is today in its offices of elder and deacon. In many ways, the PCUSA can trace its theology back to Calvin and how he set up the church in Geneva.

Calvin endeavored to select elders from among the civil rulers according to the standards set in the Scriptures, which outline the duties of overseer and censor of morals. In the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* elders are identified as "delegates" when they are in the state of "good living and honorable men, without reproach and beyond all suspicion, above all who fear God and possess the gift of spiritual prudence." Such people were elevated to "watch over the life of each person, to admonish in a friendly manner those whom they see to be at fault and leading a disorderly life, and when necessary to report them to the Company, who will be authorized to administer fraternal discipline and to do so in association with the elders."<sup>29</sup>

But there were some differences between what Calvin did and Presbyterianism in the United States did. Calvin did not separate church and state; in the United States, the church does not have the political power or the civil power that it did in Geneva. Even though there is an entire section of discipline in the Book of Order it is not commonly used by the elders in the church.

"All Christian communities in the period under consideration agreed that moral oversight, discipline, is a necessary part of church order, and all based this idea on Matthew 18:15-18, especially verse 17, which commits reproof to 'the church,' if the sinner does

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<sup>28</sup> Sung Wook Chung, *John Calvin and Evangelical Theology: Legacy and Prospect: In Celebration of the Quincentenary of John Calvin* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster Press, 2009), 209, accessed August 26, 2015, [https://books.google.com/books?id=npv9re\\_5RuwC&pg=PA209&dq=what+does+John+Calvin+Elders&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CB4Q6AEwAGoVChMI7bu56aXlXwIVQRseCh2tkg18#v=onepage&q=what%20does%20John%20Calvin%20Elders&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=npv9re_5RuwC&pg=PA209&dq=what+does+John+Calvin+Elders&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CB4Q6AEwAGoVChMI7bu56aXlXwIVQRseCh2tkg18#v=onepage&q=what%20does%20John%20Calvin%20Elders&f=false).

<sup>29</sup> Chung, *John Calvin and Evangelical Theology*, 209-10.

not heed the rebuke of two or three.”<sup>30</sup> This concept of church discipline appears to be a key factor in the Reformers’ view of elders in the church. Like the elders in the Old Testament, they were the judges over the cities and towns.

Once they were elected as elders, they were subject to annual evaluation, being examined at the end of the year to see if they had fulfilled their duties with diligence and care. Based upon the examination, either their jobs were renewed or they were replaced by another person. As in other matters, Geneva believed that frequent changes in the list of elders may cause inefficiency in ministry. From this we see that an appointment to the office of elder was not a permanent appointment in Geneva but was renewable depending upon the quality of the elder’s performance for the sake of the ministry.<sup>31</sup>

Calvin shows through these yearly evaluations of the leadership that he takes the office seriously. The yearly evaluations also help elders as they evaluate themselves in hopes that in the next year they might be more effective in their position.

But Calvin takes things further by having these elders disciple and watch over the people. Discipline according to God’s way leads to life change and redemption. The key to this disciple is that the elder must have stature and a humble, proper attitude for discipline to work. Calvin’s yearly examination is a practice not found in Scripture; Christ teaches us to examine ourselves. Second Corinthians 13:5 says, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” Paul clearly supports Calvin’s concept of self-evaluation. Calvin just put it into practice through his elder leadership.

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<sup>30</sup> Timothy George, *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990) 149, accessed August 26, 2015, <https://books.google.com/books?id=Vknr2VQSif8C&pg=PA148&dq=what+does+John+Calvin+Elders&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAWoVChMI7bu56aXlwIVQRseCh2tkg18#v=onepage&q=what%20does%20John%20Calvin%20Elders&f=false>.

<sup>31</sup> Chung, *John Calvin and Evangelical Theology*, 210.

## **Titus in Crete: A Case Study in Elder Leadership**

In the book of Titus, where Titus is apparently the church leader in Crete, Paul tells Titus he left so Titus and the church there would “appoint elders in every town as I directed you” (Tit 1:5b). Paul realized that he could not (or should not, for that matter, do everything); nor can the church leader, to whom Paul was writing, do everything. Therefore, Paul’s commission is to elect elders in every town. It was wise that Paul realized that he could not do the work alone and needed to “replace himself.”<sup>32</sup>

The first principle is that leaders must realize that they cannot do everything on their own and that they need help. When leaders realize that, they then elect elders.

The second principle in this selection or election of elders is character. Paul takes time and lays out specific characteristics that he expects in the leaders of the church. The main title for the characteristics is “above reproach” Paul says this twice, once in Titus 1:6 and again in Titus 1:7. But Paul doesn’t leave this quality up to interpretation, but he also gives some specifics. These include the quality of their married life (we can only assume the same applies to persons who are single) and their family life. It can be seen through their children that they have been brought up to follow the Lord, and they are not susceptible to doing the wrong thing or being insubordinate. The elder must not be quick-tempered, drunk, violent, or greedy. The elder should (probably must) be hospitable, love good, and be self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined (Tit 1:6-8). When Paul has set the expectations of what an elder’s character should be, he says nothing about how they should be selected or trained and goes straight to what they should do. Then, when it is determined what an elder should do, training and preparation are determined by knowing

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<sup>32</sup> Andy Stanley, Reggie Joiner, and Lane Jones, *Seven Practices of Effective Ministry* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 157-70.

what is required. Only then are elders trained to do what is required and expected of them.

Paul goes and states what elders should do in the church in Crete. First, they are to “silence” those who are deceivers, especially those who are preaching and teaching the works of the flesh (Tit 1:10-11). Second, they are called to teach sound doctrine (Tit 2). Third, they are to be obedient and do good works (Tit 3:1-11).

### **Conclusion**

There is a long history of elder leadership in the Bible, starting in the early days of the nation of Israel: elders of the tribes of Israel, elders in the towns, elders in the temple, elders in the synagogue. Because the Christian church started in the context of the Jewish nation and society, the early church also chose elders first based more on the Jewish model and then over time developing its own understanding of eldership.

In Jewish history, elders kept order, ruled, judged, disciplined, and persecuted Jesus. In New Testament times, elders were ordained by God to serve the church.

Leadership is necessary. It has been necessary from the beginning of time. Tracing the role of elders in the Bible has turned out to be a tracing of leadership in the Bible. Just as is true today, there have been good leaders in the Bible, and bad leaders in the Bible. The hope is that as elder leaders following Scripture, led by Christ Jesus and the Word, they will have the Holy Spirit with them and will fulfill Christ’s desire for the church.

The key themes throughout Scripture for elder leadership qualifications are



being above reproach; being blameless; being called to a noble task; working not for selfish gain; being examples to the flock; showing love, obedience, and humility; not being selected hastily; having a servanthood mentality; having received power from the Holy Spirit; and being appointed by God. The true heart of the qualifications lies in the character of the elder.

The duties of the elder leader as shown in Scripture are to rule, govern and judge; to discipline; to work, not merely to be in an honorary position; to rebuke sin; to witness Jesus to the world; to shepherd themselves and the people; to love, teach, preach, disciple, pray (which includes laying on hands and praying for the sick); to take care of offerings and gifts; to deal with doctrinal issues; to rebuke false doctrine; to oppose and silence those teaching the wrong message; to guard themselves and the people; to worship; to replace themselves (i.e., teach and prepare others to lead); and to lead by example.

Now that biblical elder leadership has been defined and explored, it is time to examine elder leadership in the church today. What follows is a review of current resources for training elders in the church.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE CURRENT TREND IN ELDER LEADERSHIP AND TRAINING

Elders were common in the Bible, in both the New and Old Testaments. The concept of elder has been passed down from generations, including John Calvin, who dramatically shaped the landscape of elders. The next question to answer is what are the current practices and standards for elders today. The place to start is the constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA, the Book of Order.

#### **Required Training Guidelines According to the Book of Order**

When persons have been elected to the ordered ministry of ruling elder or deacon, the session shall provide a period of study and preparation, after which the session shall examine them as to their personal faith; knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the constitution of the church; and the duties of the ministry. The session shall also confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the ministry appropriate to the order. If the examination is approved, the session shall appoint a day for the service of ordination and installation.<sup>1</sup>

The Book of Order (BOO) requires that ordained elders be trained and examined. The three areas of the training and examination are personal faith, constitution<sup>2</sup> (this area includes doctrine, government, and discipline), and duties of the ministry. The BOO also calls for an examination after the training.

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<sup>1</sup> Book of Order, 2015-2017, annotated ed. (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2015), G-2.0402.

<sup>2</sup> The constitution of the PCUSA consists of two books, the Book of Confessions (Book 1) and the Book of Order (Book 2). The Book of Confession consists of confessions, from the Apostles Creed to A Brief Statement of Faith, and the Book of Order consists of the Form of Government, Directory of Worship, Government, and Book of Discipline.

## Personal Faith

The first part of the required training is examination of personal faith. Nowhere does the BOO talk about what that should or should not look like in the life of the elder. It can only be assumed then that the session and pastor would decide what personal faith training and requirements are. Hassel, in his elder training guide *Presbyterianism's Unique Gift*, says a part of the training is to write and share "Personal Christian Experience" or "Testimony." A way to prepare a Personal Christian Experience is spelled out on page 14.<sup>3</sup> Richard Peace has a more in-depth look at how to discover, write, and present a "Spiritual Autobiography." The small group guide works through a study of Abraham's story. Through the example of Abraham's life, the small group learns how to connect and share what God has been doing in their lives.<sup>4</sup>

Exploring the nine constitutional questions that must be answered in front of the congregation by all new ruling elders, the first three questions bring light onto what is expected in the personal faith of elders in the Presbyterian Church USA. The first question is, "Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?"<sup>5</sup> This first question requires elders to submit humbly to their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and believe in the one triune God. The basis for all personal faith comes from answering this first question. This first question shows that elders are monotheistic trinitarians.<sup>6</sup> The second constitutional question states: "Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New

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<sup>3</sup> Harry S. Hassall, *Presbyterianism's Unique Gift: Ordained Lay Elders* (Brentwood, TN: Middle Way Ministries, 1999), 14-15.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Peace, *Spiritual Autobiography: Discovering and Sharing Your Spiritual Story* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Book of Order, 2015-2017, W-4.4003a.

<sup>6</sup> Paul S. Wright, *The Presbyterian Ruling Elder: An Essential Guide*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2014), 17.

Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?"<sup>7</sup>

This second question focuses on the Holy Scriptures and making sure that even though our faith is in Jesus Christ alone, we accept the Scriptures to be God's revelation and the way that we know Jesus Christ and his will and rule for our lives. The idea is that a ruling elder should know the Bible well. This was mirrored in Scripture, as everyone should know the Bible well, but especially elders, who are called to teach, preach, and reproach using Scripture.<sup>8</sup> The third question is, "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?"<sup>9</sup>

This third question about personal faith moves into the faith stream of the Reformed tradition. Even though nowhere it is explained what the "essential tenets" of the faith are, this question points the elders to understand what it means to be Reformed, in contrast to Catholic or Anabaptist tradition. These three constitutional questions from the Directory of Worship in the Book of Order do a great deal in explaining what is required, looked for, and should be taught in preparation for elders: saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; knowledge and understanding that Scripture is our authority; and an understanding of what it means to be Reformed.

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<sup>7</sup> Book of Order, 2015-2017, W-4.4003b.

<sup>8</sup> See chapter 2 on what the Bible says about elders and their roles. Paul's letter to Titus makes this exceptionally clear.

<sup>9</sup> Book of Order, 2015-2017, W-4.4003c.

## Constitution

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA is made up of two books, the Book of Order and the Book of Confessions.<sup>10</sup> The constitutional questions consist of elders being “guided” by the confessions and governing the church by church polity and discipline.<sup>11</sup> The key here is the two books, the Book of Order and the Book of Confessions. It might be unreasonable to expect every elder to know by heart the two books (or is that the requirement the church needs from its elders today?), but the elders of the church should be familiar with both books. Elders should have looked through both books, understand the confessions and how they explain Scripture, and know how to find items in the Book of Order.

## Duties of Ministry

These duties are spelled out in the Book of Order G-2.0301. But because each congregation uses its ruling elders in different ways, the duties will change slightly from congregation to congregation. The short list of responsibilities (G-2.0301) is “leadership, government, spiritual discernment, disciple, and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church.”<sup>12</sup> Even though it is a short list, those five items encompass a large part of the church ministry. In G-3.0201 the responsibility of the session (which is made up of the ruling elders and the teaching elders) includes to “provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard” “provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received”; and “nurture the covenant

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<sup>10</sup> Book of Order, 2015-2017, F-3.04.

<sup>11</sup> Book of Order, 2015-2017, W-4.4003d, e.

<sup>12</sup> Book of Order, 2015-2017, G-2.030.

community of disciples of Christ.”<sup>13</sup> The first is about spiritual nurture, having worship on a weekly basis, educational opportunities, and nurturing the congregation spiritually. This includes making sure the Word is proclaimed and that the church is growing in discipleship. The second is about baptism and communion. Communion is to be celebrated at least four times a year, and baptism is for those who have professed Christ but have never been baptized and for the children of God who are a part of his covenant.<sup>14</sup> The third of these is “nurturing the covenant community”:

This responsibility shall include receiving and dismissing members; reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership; providing programs of nurture, education, and fellowship; training, examining, ordaining, and installing those elected by the congregation as ruling elders and deacons; encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources; managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission; directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation; employing the administrative staff of the congregation; leading the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church; warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.<sup>15</sup>

This list of responsibilities of the elders of the church is exhausting and all-inclusive. The basics are membership and everything that is involved in running a church. This last category brings us the business side of the church, including dealing with the stewardship of money, employees, the physical property of the church, the committees that report to session, and to training and installing new elders.

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<sup>13</sup> Book of Order, 2015-2017, G-0201a, b, c.

<sup>14</sup> Presbyterians baptize infants and babies who are children of faithful members who commit to teach the child and train the child in relationship with Jesus Christ. Because God chooses us, we believe he will be faithful and call the child of a believer. This covenant is between God and his people; God is the one who makes it and keeps it.

<sup>15</sup> Book of Order, 2015-2017, G-0201c.

Now that the constitution has been defined, what is expected of elders in the Presbyterian Church USA according to the constitution? How are elders being trained? What are the resources that are available? How do they compare and work toward the expectations for the elders?

### **Resources for Training Elders**

Since this project has been started, there has been a noticeable increase in training and information resources. Many new resources and articles have been added to the PCUSA website concerning training for ruling elders and elders.<sup>16</sup>

On the “Helpful Resources” page, there are three suggested books: *Selected to Serve: A Guide for Church Leaders* (2nd ed.) by Earl S. Johnson, *Presbyterian Polity for Church Leaders* (4th ed.) by Joan S. Gray and Joyce C. Tucker, and *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* by Joan S. Gray.<sup>17</sup> There is also a list of other online resources, books, videos, elder training courses that churches have created, articles about elders, and links to other elder websites.

Earl S. Johnson Jr.’s *Selected to Serve* is the first book listed in the “Helpful Resources” of the PCUSA denominational website. The contents of *Selected to Serve* include the call to serve; a description and explanation of the offices of the church; the election process; duties of church leaders; staff and volunteer positions in the church; the Book of Order; the history of Presbyterian government; the Directory of Worship;

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<sup>16</sup> Office of the General Assembly, “Helpful Resources,” accessed October 22, 2015 <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/ruling-elders/helpful-resources/>.

<sup>17</sup> “Helpful Resources.”

conflict in the church and the Rules of Discipline; the Book of Confessions; the ordination vows; ethical and professional standards; and growing your church.<sup>18</sup>

*Selected to Serve* is a great resource as elders prepare for service. It is easy to read and covers the materials it talks about very well. It does not cover everything that the Book of Order says every elder should know, do, and understand. The main focus is on the constitutional part of the training and education of the elders. It is quite thorough in dealing with the “knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the constitution of the church.”<sup>19</sup> Its dealing with the Book of Order (which includes all four parts) is extensive, as is the material about the Book of Confessions, where Johnson discusses all of the confessions in the Book of Confessions. This information is not discussed in other resources as effectively as Johnson does. The book does touch on the other two major responsibilities of elders, as it goes through the ordination vows, which also are covered well. This book would be a good homework book for an elder leadership training class.<sup>20</sup> The drawback is that his book is not a class, as Hassall’s book is (see below). A major advantage to the second edition of Johnson’s book is that it has been updated for the new form of government,<sup>21</sup> so that all the references to the Book of Order are accurate. In chapter 2 of this project, it is mentioned how Paul tells Titus to use Scripture to reproach and how Calvin’s elders were to disciple. Johnson takes discipling seriously and included it in his book. To complement the training offered in *Selected to Serve*, one would need to add material about exploring one’s spiritual journey, Bible

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<sup>18</sup> Earl S. Johnson Jr., *Selected to Serve: A Guide for Church Officers*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Book of Order, 2015-2017, G-2.0402.

<sup>20</sup> One of the first elder training events that I was a part of as an associate pastor was a one-day class in which this book was read to the new elders. This was not an effective way to train elders. I believe the book was intended to be given to new officers of the church to read on their own. Having new officers read the book and then gather as a group to discuss the readings would be an effective form of training.

<sup>21</sup> The new form of government was approved in 2011 for the Presbyterian Church USA.



study, Reformed theology, handling the responsibilities of the church, and the elder as teacher and disciple maker.

Another entry on the list of resources (“Helpful Resources”)<sup>22</sup> is *The Presbyterian Ruling Elder: and Essential Guide*. A review on the website says:

For those considering becoming ruling elders and those who have been elected to this ordered ministry. Explains the meaning of the term “ruling elder” and the qualifications and duties of this ministry. The book goes on to explore the relationship of ruling elders to other elders, the role of the ruling elder on session and in presbytery, and the relationships to pastors and to the whole church. Fully revised based on the new Form of Government of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), this book is invaluable for new ruling elders preparing for their role.<sup>23</sup>

Even though this book has many good features, its primary use should be for those who have been asked to serve as elder. It would be helpful for a nominating committee to read or study before making nominations, or for someone who has been asked to serve as an elder to study before deciding to accept nomination. To use this book for training would be very light on the training side. The emphasis on the book is on God Calls Persons to Serve; Who Qualifies to Be a Ruling Elder?; What Must a Ruling Elder Be?; The Session; The Churches and the Church; The Session and the Pastor. It is mentioned that “the difference between ‘lay’ and ‘clergy’ lies in particular functions performed by those who are ordained.”<sup>24</sup> That is, there are not two classes in the church; the ruling elders are as important as the pastor or teaching elders, and all are equally called by God for the roles they fulfill.

In “Who Qualifies to Be a Ruling Elder?” (chapter 2), the first three vows (the ones concerning faith) are gone through in detail. Of the books reviewed, this book spends more time on faith and calling than do the rest. A key requirement that is linked

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<sup>22</sup> “Helpful Resources.”

<sup>23</sup> “Helpful Resources.”

<sup>24</sup> Wright, *The Presbyterian Ruling Elder*, 2-3.

back to chapter 2 of this project is humility. “It is perhaps inevitable that anyone called by God to exercise leadership in the church should hesitate to respond at once to the summons. . . . So if our immediate reaction to the invitation to be a ruling elder is, ‘I’m not the person for the job; there must be others better fitted for it.’ We are following a familiar pattern.”<sup>25</sup> In the previous chapter we learned that the character of the elder is one of the most important qualities the Bible lists for elder eligibility.

*The Presbyterian Ruling Elder* is the first book that has emphasized the character of the elder. Wright goes on to share more about who is called to be an elder. He then talks about the session which the elder will be serving on and the relationship of the elders to the pastor and the church. Because no major theology or polity is involved, this book would not constitute a complete training, but the value in this book would be for those who are considering accepting the call or someone who is exploring what it means to be an elder in the Presbyterian Church. It is not written in a study-guide format, so it would be best for self-study or for people to read and then discuss in a group. The book has been updated to reflect the new form of government.<sup>26</sup>

### **Online Resources on the PCUSA Website**

“Called to Discipleship: Preparing Church Officers for Leadership” is “a complete training course used at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis, MN.”<sup>27</sup> This is a downloadable, printable resource that Westminster Presbyterian Church put together

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<sup>25</sup> Wright, *The Presbyterian Ruling Elder*, 30-31. This comment refers to Moses: “But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?’” (Exod 3:11).

<sup>26</sup> Wright, *The Presbyterian Ruling Elder*. It was originally written in 1957.

<sup>27</sup> Katherine S. Michael, “Called to Discipleship,” copyright © 2010. Materials in this booklet and accompanying CD may be freely reproduced with the notation that such materials are used with the permission of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Minneapolis, MN. Accessed October 22, 2015, <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/ruling-elders/helpful-resources/>.

after realizing that three to six hours of training was not sufficient to train and equip the leaders of the church. There is no doubt that this resource has changed the leaders in Westminster Presbyterian Church, and they themselves have said it has transformed them. Many things help this material stand out from everything else; primary among them is the fact that they have created Appendix C, “Basic Officer Responsibly and Expectations,” which includes:

- Attend five months of training
- Be examined by Session
- Attend worship regularly (wear name tag available at Reception Desk)
- Support the church financially through a pledge of any amount
- Addend Session meetings
- Serve in at least one area of the Session’s ministries on a Council, a committee, or other form of ministry
- Councils of Session: Worship, Evangelism & Fellowship (includes Women’s Ministries), Faith in Action, Pastoral Care, Children, Youth & Families, Adult Education
- Serve Communion on the first Sunday of each month
- Assist with Sunday 9:30 Communion on occasion
- Participate in Session worship service on occasion
- Attend Presbytery Meeting once a year<sup>28</sup>

This list is a complete job description of all that elders are expected to do. This is the first place that the responsibilities have been spelled out so specifically. The one part that is less specific and might need to be tweaked is what “attend worship regularly” means. For some people, regular worship is twice a year or once a month, so there could be some more specifics. As a whole, however, if someone is thinking about being called to be an elder, one can look at this list of responsibilities, discern one’s calling, and determine willingness to make the time commitment it takes to fulfill the role of elder.

Part of this curriculum includes as homework everyone reading through *Selected to Serve: A Guide for Church Leaders* by Earl S. Johnson Jr. (see the review above).

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<sup>28</sup> Michael, “Called to Discipleship,” Appendix C, 7.

“Called to Discipleship” includes Bible studies (with notes about the teaching time) and takes the study of the Bible seriously. It discusses spiritual gifts; the responsibilities of the elders are clearly listed; new elders are mentored; there is a phase 2 of continued learning as elders take classes each year to continue to grow. It is apparent that Westminster and Katherine S. Michael spent time and did their homework on this material. The booklet is well done.

In comparison with the other resources examined here, something is lacking in “Called to Discipleship.” A busy pastor with limited time will find the materials confusing, in the sense of how they all go together—there is no simple outline and teacher’s guide. By contrast, Hassall’s book is ready for use with very little preparation. This Westminster Presbyterian Church’s material will take a long time for a pastor to put together into a course outline with teaching (unless there is a teacher’s manual available). According to the information in the booklet, it is written to the 2007 Book of Order, so that will need to be updated to the new form of government. This booklet puts new elders through five months of training. That is wonderful to prepare elders for ordained ministry, but in a smaller church, where it is hard to get someone to serve as an elder, it might be unreasonable to have five months of training.<sup>29</sup> Assessments such as Myers Briggs and LifeKeys, which are used in this training, are ones a typical pastor might not feel comfortable administering and assessing (without more training). In the training about group dynamics, “Westminster invites a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist to

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<sup>29</sup> It is hard, though we should not settle for the least common denominator in training elders. But in a small church, where the pool of leaders is smaller, developing a shorter leadership course might be best. As the leadership in the congregation grows, then the leadership training course could grow and change also. If a church is going from no leadership training to an intense leadership training, the new elders are more equipped and prepared as the elders who have been serving for years beforehand. That would lead to the phase 2 training that Westminster also does.

teach this class.”<sup>30</sup> This is a great idea and probably helpful, but it does make preparation harder, and some pastors might not have the resources to make this happen. One section that seems to be missing from this curriculum is the faith story writing of new elders and the time spent on what it means to have faith in Jesus Christ.

Other researchers start with articles written about elders. These are not courses or training but are informational. They could be included in training but are less helpful than some of the other resources mentioned.

In an article, “10 Things Ruling Elders Should Know,” the ten things are: God called you to this service; We are Presbyterian not congregational or episcopal; There are four councils, or governing levels, in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); Presbyters are commissioners, not delegates; When presbyters are gathered as deliberative bodies, decisions are made by voting; “Ruling” in the title of ruling elders is about measuring, not flexing power; Compassion is one of the characteristics of ruling elders; We sometimes disagree; We are a constitutional church; and We are a connectional church.<sup>31</sup> That ruling elders are called by God is important to remember as ruling elders are selected and trained.

### **In-Depth Resources for Training Elders**

Henry Hassall served at Highland Park Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas, until his retirement in 1998. Through many years of training elders to serve in the local congregation he wrote *Presbyterianism’s Unique Gift: Ordained Lay Elders* as a guide to train people to be elders in the Presbyterian Church USA. The book is specific to the

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<sup>30</sup> Michael, “Called to Discipleship,” part 1, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Alyson Janke, “10 Things Ruling Elders Should Know,” August 5, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://pres-outlook.org/2015/08/10-things-ruling-elders-should-know/>.

Presbyterian Church USA and follows what the Book of Order says the elders of the church should be like. Because of the date of this guide (1999), it does not include the updates from the new form of government of the Presbyterian Church USA; however, even though the form of government has been changed the roles and duties of the elders have not changed drastically.<sup>32</sup> This manual cannot be used exactly as is because it refers to an old Book of Order. The material that Hassall used was from the Presbyterian Church in the United States before the northern and southern church reunited in 1983.<sup>33</sup>

Hassall has prepared a course that entails six sessions consisting of twelve hours total of classroom time followed by an open-book exam and an oral exam. The class is extensive and is the most in-depth preparation for elders among the resources reviewed here. Topics of the course include Personal Christian Experience; Discovering of Spiritual Gifts; Calling and Character; Biblical Qualifications; Vows; The Presbyterian Church and its history; The Reformation; Presbyterian Doctrine; Theology; The Great Ends of the Church; Presbyterian Confessions; Essential Tenets of the Reformed Faith; Church Discipline; Presbyterian Belief System; Five Points of Calvinism; The Sacraments; Polity; Responsibility of the Session; Organization of the Session; Church Organization and Committee Structure; oral exam preparation.<sup>34</sup>

This is no doubt the most complete and inclusive training manual that could be found for training elders.<sup>35</sup> The book is very good at teaching theology, polity, Reformed

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<sup>32</sup> Hassall, *Presbyterianism's Unique Gift*, preface and acknowledgements.

<sup>33</sup> In 1861 the Presbyterian Church in the United States split into over the issue of abolition, thus going from the Presbyterian Church to the United Presbyterian Church in the north and the Presbyterian Church in the United States in the south. See [www.religioustolerance.org/home\\_pru6.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/home_pru6.htm), accessed November 2, 2015; [www.hithcc.org](http://www.hithcc.org), accessed November 2, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Hassall, *Presbyterianism's Unique Gift*, 6,7.

<sup>35</sup> This book is so complete and ready to be used that I based much of my first elder training on it and information given to me from two pastor friends of mine. But this manual is very good and goes through much of the polity and theology that elders in the Presbyterian Church need to know.

tradition, Presbyterian tradition and faith, and much more—all the key elements of the Book of Order’s guidelines for the roles and responsibilities of the ruling elder. If there were any things to add to the book, they would be spirituality, discipleship, and teaching the elder to lead as a teacher of Scripture and a disciple maker. The book is a wonderful resource, but it is a dated book (notably, the references to the Book of Order). A study like Richard Peace’s *Spiritual Autobiography* would be more complete and helpful in getting elders to write their spiritual autobiography. A teaching style update, with more class participation and maybe even the elders themselves teaching a class after preparing (or, maybe even better, having the current ruling elders teach this class to the new elders), would be helpful. There could be more focus on Bible study (each session could have a Bible study in it).

The strongest and best part of this resource from Hassall is that it is a complete course. It includes exact class sessions, what to do each and every class session, homework each week, the books themselves (the student and the teacher manual), study materials, tests. All of this is a boon for a busy pastor who is struggling with a heavy schedule yet wanting to train the leaders of the church. Hassall also has worked hard and done a very good job of including all that the Book of Order wants the elders of the Presbyterian Church to know, understand, and do. It is strange that this resource is not included on the denominational website as a helpful tool in preparing elders to serve.

### **Elder Training Outside the Presbyterian Church**

Keeping with the Reformed tradition but stepping out of the Presbyterian Church in America, *The Challenge of Eldership* by Donald J. MacNair takes a biblical view on

what it means to be an elder. “1 Timothy 3:1 calls the work of the elder ‘a noble task.’ One implication of this verse is that to be an elder is to be engaged in work and not merely to hold an office or achieve a certain status. The work of the elder is, however, a work of honor, a noble task, in the kingdom of God.”<sup>36</sup> MacNair then defines what that noble task is: guarding. He talks about the elder guarding himself and guarding the flock (see the shepherd model of leadership in chapter 2 of this project). This guarding, as talked about by MacNair, also can be traced to what Paul was teaching Titus (see chapter 2 of this project).

In his chapter 6, MacNair also talks about the tensions of being an elder. As this material was studied, there is a tension between training an elder to be a Christ-like shepherd leader and spending more time more on theological training. MacNair writes about these tensions. “To be an elder is to deal with tensions—tensions in one’s own personal life and tensions in the church.”<sup>37</sup> To manage these tensions he gives five guidelines: “Elders must be perceived as mature men of God”;<sup>38</sup> “Elders must understand what the church is what it has been called to be based upon the teaching of scripture”; “Elders must prepare new candidates for membership to assume their role in the church”; “The elders must anticipate growth and worth to help the church grow in numbers and in strength” The elder must be discerning in choosing which leadership model to follow in a given situation.”<sup>39</sup> These five guidelines point to the big idea of the book, which is “Spiritual Maturity Is the Bottom Line.”<sup>40</sup> This tension—the balance between being a

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<sup>36</sup> Donald J. MacNair, *The Challenge of the Eldership: A Handbook for the Elders of the Church* (Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications, 1984), 7.

<sup>37</sup> MacNair, *The Challenge of the Eldership*, 43.

<sup>38</sup> The PCA church does not acknowledge that women can be leaders in the church. The PCUSA and ECO affirm that women are important leaders in the church.

<sup>39</sup> MacNair, *The Challenge of the Eldership*, 43-45.

<sup>40</sup> MacNair, *The Challenge of the Eldership*, 45.



spiritual, mature elder and a business elder—is one that must be explored. MacNair’s focus is on the spiritual maturity of the elder. The training (or lack thereof) of PCUSA elders might be leading toward having elders who are not as based in Scripture as they should be.<sup>41</sup> This can be a result of training or a lack of emphasis on the spiritual side of being an elder and is something the PCUSA might need to explore.

MacNair’s book is best suited to be used for homework or self-study, either for someone considering the call to be an elder, or for a nominating committee to study as they work on selecting a slate of candidates. The book is heavy on the spiritual side of the task of elder and should be included in growing elders to be spiritually mature shepherds of God.

In the Baptist tradition, elders were not a typical part of the church. Newton and Schmucker admit that the Baptist church in American does not know what to do with elders. They say that their confessions, dating from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, have the office of deacon and elder. Newton and Schmucker are trying to bring back the biblical role of elder in the church.<sup>42</sup>

### **Continued Training and Development of Elders**

The Presbyterian Church has realized that training elders is an important topic and therefore has created “Ruling Elder Ministries.” “Ruling Elder Ministries is a new focus of the Office of General Assembly with the vision of providing support and training to

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<sup>41</sup> See chapter 1 of this project, where research about the lack of Scripture study and prayer are discussed.

<sup>42</sup> Phil A. Newton, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014), 92.

the office of Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).”<sup>43</sup> This website includes the definition of the ruling elder according to the Book of Order and boasts “Exciting New Resources for Ruling Elders.” Among those resources, the denomination advises, “The Presbyterian Outlook recently published an issue that includes articles related to officer training. Read the ‘10 Things Ruling Elders Should Know.’”<sup>44</sup> In addition, resources and presentations from several ruling elder workshops at the recent Big Tent event in Knoxville, TN will soon be posted here as well.”<sup>45</sup> The “Regarding Ruling Elders” is a service that produces an article a month for ruling elders to read. “This series seeks to lift up the specific responsibilities while also providing an opportunity to reflect upon how they are lived out.”<sup>46</sup> The idea behind this is that elders in a congregation might

Designate one ruling elder or staff person to forward the web link to all ruling elders when new articles are released on the 15th of each month; Encourage ruling elders to add their contact information to the Ruling Elder Network to receive a notice when articles are released; Cut and paste the article in your church or mid council newsletter; Use the current month’s article for discussion at the monthly session meeting; Compile the articles for use at ruling elder training; Post the articles and/or a link to the ruling elder website on the church website; Use the articles in a group of teaching elders to spark discussion about ways of assisting ruling elders in that particular part of their ministry role.<sup>47</sup>

The denomination has realized this is an important topic and is doing what it can to improve the training and continued education of ruling elders in the church. The first

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<sup>43</sup> <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/ruling-elders/>, accessed October 24, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> See above where this article was discussed.

<sup>45</sup> <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/ruling-elders/>, accessed October 24, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/ruling-elders/>, accessed October 24, 2015.

<sup>47</sup> <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/ruling-elders/ways-use-regarding-ruling-elders/>, accessed October 24, 2015.

Re: Ruling Elders was produced in March 2014.<sup>48</sup> However, this is not training; it is a service that provides articles that elders are encouraged to read.

### **The Influence of Elder Leader Institute on Elders**

Elder Leader Institute (ELI) trains elders. The mission statement of Elder Leader Institute, which was mentioned in chapter 1, is: “Developing ruling elders to be spiritual leaders in the church through a two phase holistic program of teaching plus a retreat, practicums, spiritual disciplines and leadership opportunities.”<sup>49</sup> This group has a two phases (+) program. In phase one,

Each pastor and elder will complete the short book, *Spiritual Autobiography: Discovering and Sharing Your Spiritual Story* by Richard Peace. Each person will read the small book *Unleader: The Surprising Qualities of a Valuable Leader* by Jane Overstreet, which compares the leadership of King Saul with King David. *Unleader* can be used as a Bible study for individuals or small groups. In addition, the Session will prepare with their pastor(s) the storyline of their church, beginning from its founding (who/when/why) through its major turning points (both positive and negative in outcome), the church’s current strengths and challenges and its sense of mission in the world. Include the anticipated future looking toward the next five years.<sup>50</sup>

This preparation time is followed by a two-day session retreat with video teaching from Jerry Sittser. Phase two consists of monthly sessions with ten- to twelve-minute training videos followed by discussion questions, which should take a total of thirty minutes a month. There is also an immersion spiritual retreat for the pastor and two to five elders from the congregation during the process. The goal is that the church can send as many elders each year as possible until the culture of the church has changed. Along with the above resources, ELI offers Christian coaches to come alongside the pastors of

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.pcusa.org/browse/news-post/departments/ruling-elders/?page=5>, accessed October 24, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.elderleadership.org/>, accessed October 24, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.elderleadership.org/program/>, accessed October 24, 2015.

the churches who are going through ELI.<sup>51</sup> ELI does well because it is training. The program uses video, current technologies, and readings. The monthly training videos and discussion has been professionally planned and prepared. Because it is a program that is in place, it would be easy for a pastor to use this program in a church.

ELI has been created by a group from the Evangelical Covenant Order and Fellowship of Presbyterians. They have seen the need for spiritual elders and worked to make ELI a reality. This institute focuses on the spiritual side of eldership. It is easy for pastors to be involved; they do not have to create their own continuing education. This is also the only resource that provides a coach for the pastor during the process. It appears to be a great opportunity for churches to grow the spiritual side of their elders.

Because ELI does focus on the spiritual side, elders will need another way to learn the duties and nuts and bolts of the denomination, theology, polity, and the church. Also, ELI is only for elders who are already serving. There is a fee for signing up and receiving all of the materials.

Both the PCUSA and those in ELI have realized that elders need continued support and training, and so both have created a process to make that happen. There are two ways that elder leaders are being trained and taught. One is after they are elected and before they take office (this aligns with the Book of Order and Session requirements that the session must train and examine new officers before they are ordained into office); they can continue to grow as elders once they have taken office. This is seen through ELI and the PCUSA's Ruling Elders Ministry. The other possibility is that elders are not being taught. Instead, they have to learn everything as they go on their own. This is the least preferred method.

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<sup>51</sup> <http://www.elderleadership.org/program/>, accessed October 24, 2015.

### **Other Elements to Consider in Training Elders**

According to the constitution of the PCUSA and other church sources, the key elements of the elder are personal faith; knowledge of the constitution, doctrine, government, discipleship knowledge and duties; leadership; spiritual discernment; the ability to disciple others; the ability to shepherd others; making sure the Word is preached; making sure the sacraments are performed; taking care of finances; staffing; church membership; equipping future elders; managing facilities; stewardship; mentoring; directing ministries; nurturing the congregation; and educating the congregation in Christ Jesus.

How does this list compare with the biblical expectations that were brought to light in chapter 2? For the most part they are very similar. Some differences are that today many more responsibilities are placed on elders around the organization and structure of the church: for example, facilities, finances, budget, stewardship, staffing, membership, and education classes.

However, one major part of expectations that is missing today is the Bible's emphasis on character (being above reproach and being blameless). These qualities were not mentioned much in training materials; Hassall brought up the challenging passages in his study guide. Scripture focused more on the character of elders than on the duties of the elders. Today, the church has taken the opposite approach, focusing more on duties and training than on character. Is it because it is hard to form character? Or is it that forming character is a multiyear endeavor and we need leaders now? Do we not think character is important, or do we think character is something we cannot change, or do we

assume that everyone who is in the church has the proper character? Character of elders could be a research project in itself!

### **Conclusion**

Now that current literature about expectations and training of elders has been explored, the next major questions to ask are, Are elders being trained? Are they being trained in what they need to be trained in (both the Bible and current practices and literature)? Is all of that knowledge and training preparing them for ministry as a ruling elder?

A major question is about the balance between spiritual maturity and what one might call the business side of leadership. It is not a question of either/or, but both/and, and which gets the most attention in training and practice. From this research it appears for the most part the PCUSA, even though it does acknowledge the role of shepherd, relies more heavily on the work/theological study side of the equation. Outside of the PCUSA elder research and training, the focus moves more toward being Christ-like and shepherding. The challenge is to create a balance between the two.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT RESEARCH

The Bible has been explored; the Book of Order and current literature on leadership training has been explored. But the real question now is what is actually happening now with elder training. Answering this question is the heart of this project. This is an exploratory study of the expectations and the realities of elder training in the Presbyterian church in south Florida.

#### **New Members Joining the Church: An Example of Lack of Elder Training**

“Tonight we have the pleasure to welcome two new members into the fellowship of First Presbyterian Church. James and Jane Doe have come to us and after re-confession of faith they would like to unite with us as members of the church,” says the pastor to the session at their regular meeting. This meeting is one to which visitors are invited when they want to become members of the church.

James shares his faith journey. After being baptized as a child in the church, he strayed from his faith. Now, through the ministries of First Presbyterian Church, James has come back to his faith and has recommitted his life to Jesus Christ. The session members are ecstatic that the ministries of First Presbyterian Church are making a difference in people’s lives and bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ. After James and Jane answer the membership questions required by the church and denomination, the session unanimously received James and Jane into the membership of the church.

“Since James has had such a wonderful life-changing experience recently at First Presbyterian Church and has now recommitted his life to Jesus Christ, I believe we should rebaptize him!” Mark, one of the elders of First Presbyterian Church, said enthusiastically.

For Pastor Bob, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church, suddenly the air was sucked out of the room. The belief of the pastor, church, and denomination is that there is one baptism; the childhood baptism of James is efficient and God’s grace was bestowed then. There are no rebaptisms. Mark, however, grew up in a Baptist church and background, where in order to join a church a person must be baptized, even if that person had been baptized before as a child. Mark was serving his first term as an elder of First Presbyterian Church; he had transferred his membership from First Baptist Church within the last year. Pastor Bob was also saddened that another session member, Jan, seemed to like the idea of rebaptism. The rest of the session members did not know what to say but did not have major objections to this rebaptism.

Pastor Bob realized that this would be a teaching moment, but also realized that this was the wrong time to be teaching basic Reformed, Presbyterian beliefs to his session. This was also confusing to James and Jane Doe, who even though they had been baptized, were both young in their new faith and did not understand what the issues of rebaptism were.

Pastor Bob further realized that it was time to re-evaluate his elder training, because the elders of the church did not understand the basic beliefs of the Presbyterian



faith. He realized there was a gap between what the elders needed to know, understand, and live and where they were in their knowledge and understanding.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Current State of Elder Training in the Presbyterian Church**

The idea behind this project is that there is a gap in the training (or no training at all) between what an elder should know and be prepared to do. The project itself will determine if indeed there is a gap between what the Bible describes as elder leadership, what the Book of Order and current literature teach elders to do, and what is happening in elder training. The big question is, “Are the elders being trained to be the leaders that they are called to be?”

### **Research Design and Goals**

The research aspect of this thesis will consist of surveys and semi-structured interviews of six congregations in the south Florida area.<sup>2</sup> The first and foremost question to be answered is, “What is being done with training in elders in ministry?” This will be examined from two perspectives, the perspective of the pastors of the church and the elders themselves.

The pastors will be interviewed through a semi-structured interview.<sup>3</sup> After basic demographic questions are asked, the questions will revolve around the type of training that the elders receive at the church, whether the pastor feels the training is successful or

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<sup>1</sup> Names have been changed to protect privacy, but this event took place in a congregation. The outcome was not as positive as portrayed in the story.

<sup>2</sup> The research design of this thesis-project relied heavily on the expertise of Bryan C. Auday, PhD. Dr. Auday teaches at Gordon College and instructs doctor of ministry students at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary about research methodology. Through consultation with Dr. Auday, the research methodologies of surveys and interviews were decided upon, and results were created and examined.

<sup>3</sup> The interview form is shown in Appendix 1.

not, how the training process has changed over time, what type of materials and or resources are being used, expectations of the elders, and what are the key roles of elders in the congregation. Six head or solo pastors of congregations in south Florida will be interviewed for this project.

The second aspect of this project will be online surveys with the ruling elders of each of the six congregations. This survey will be administered through Survey Monkey. Basic demographic questions will include how long respondents have served as elder and if this is their first term serving. The main emphasis of the questions will include whether the elders feel properly trained for the ministry of elder; where are the deficiencies of the training; from the elder's perspective what would have been helpful to have been taught or learned in order to be a better prepared elder; and what was the most successful or helpful training and why.<sup>4</sup>

The hope is that the demographic questions will give clarity on what those elders who are in their first year feel compared with those elders who have served before and have had more time to think and learn about the many tasks the elders are expected to do. This is an important part of research: trying to determine what roles are the elders fulfilling in the church. Knowing this information will help narrow the requirements of elders. The Book of Order is all-inclusive, and its list (see chapter 3 of this project; also G-2.0301 and G-3.0201) says so much that there is no possible way everything listed in the Book of Order could be taught. In essence, this list says the elders are responsible for everything that happens in the church.

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 2.

## The Sample Group

The churches surveyed are a representative sample of Presbyterian churches in the south Florida area. They represent a wide range of theological beliefs and a wide range of pastoral experience in leading a congregation. This sample was chosen to compare pastors who have been pastors for decades alongside pastors who are in their first ten years of ministry, as well as pastors who consider themselves to be “conservative and evangelical” with pastors who consider themselves to be “progressive.” The composition of this sample is to increase the external validity. The variety of churches involved in the study should show the extent to how the research applies to ministry in general. The hope is that the reach of the research potentially applies to more groups and makes it more powerful.

Among the pastors, their experience ranges from twenty-eight years in ministry to four years in ministry. The group is made up of pastors who went from college to seminary to ministry, to a pastor who has owned his own company for twenty years, served as an elder, and then felt the calling to ministry, sold his business, and became a pastor. The pastors have been serving their current congregations for three months at a minimum to four and a half years as the longest current tenure. Even though this sample is comprised of pastors who have been in the ministry for quite some time, they have all been at their current call for less than five years. The pastors’ journeys to where they are now are also varied: being from the north or the south; being associate pastors, youth pastors, or church planning pastors all before their current calling; being a pastor of a yoked congregation in a very rural area. The congregations varied from one hundred

members to eight hundred members. The churches have existed for twenty-five years to many years.

### Intended Results of Project

The intended result of this research is to give good guidance for the PCUSA and ECO toward elder training. This research should also be helpful to pastors as they prepare to train the future elders of the church. Trends of training (or lack of training) combined with how the elders evaluate the training can help to see how effective training is. Another aspect of preparing elders includes the tasks that the elders are fulfilling; this list can be compared with the tasks laid out in Scripture and in the literature, especially the Book of Order.

### The Pastor Interviews

All of the pastors interviewed said yes when asked if they believed that elders should receive formal training to prepare them for service. The gap comes in when the question was asked about what training the elders were receiving before the pastor arrived at the church. When answering this question, all of the pastors responded that before they arrived at their church there was no elder training in place. All of the pastors that I talked to had either put an elder training course in place or were in the process of doing so.<sup>5</sup> It was good that the pastors were taking seriously the importance of elder training; the question should be asked why no elder training took place at the church before. A good follow-up set of questions is to find out whether or not the church has

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<sup>5</sup> One pastor who was interviewed had been at his current call for less than three months, and although he had no training in place he was working on putting it in place before the next class of elders.

ever had elder training, when it was, and how long the church has been without elder training. This would help assess if the concept of elder training is a newer concept or a concept that was once prevalent but has fallen off in recent years. One of the pastors responded: “With the time demands of a pastor, they don’t have time to train and they feel that is one area in the church they can get away with not training them.”<sup>6</sup> No doubt the time constraints on pastors are overwhelming and trade-offs must be taken, but the lack of training elders promotes a continued cycle of pastors being overwhelmed. The elders are the people in the church who should be helping the pastor lead the church. If elders are trained properly to do ministry, then they should be able to help the pastor do ministry and therefore give the pastor help and support, which might make the pastor less overwhelmed in ministry.

The first gap between the training and expectations that was found was a lack of training for elders. But the good news is that all of the pastors interviewed thought that intentionally training elders is a good thing to do. One of the pastors said he did not have any training set up yet but was planning to do so with his next class of elders.

When asked if just the first-time elders needed to come to training or if it was for everyone, the pastors responded that all elders who were elected needed to come to the training. One of the comments was that since they first served things could have changed, so it was important for all the elders rotating onto session to go through the training. Also, it was a good way for the new leaders to get to know one another through the training process.

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<sup>6</sup> Pastor C, phone call, personal interview with author, December 4, 2015.

### ***The Roles of Pastors and Elders***

The pastors were very specific about the responsibilities of the elders in their churches. The majority of the pastors (four out of six) listed mostly business types of tasks: monthly meeting (session), chair committees, finance committee, human resource committee, preschool committee, property committee, help with deacons, serving communion, ushering, greeting, financial things, strategy, vision, assisting pastor with personnel, budgeting, curriculum, Bible study, Christian education committee, and maintenance committee. All of these duties are important to keep a church running; the session as the leadership of the church is responsible for getting these things done. In four out of six churches the elders were the ones running the church. They had to make sure everything happened or nothing would happen. As one of the pastors said, the elders are the ones asked first to do everything.

Two pastors had unique responses to the responsibility of the elders. The first pastor said that session reorganization was going on, and in the new restructuring there were three major responsibilities of every elder:

1. Pray. Each elder received an updated roster each quarter, and it was the elder's responsibility to pray for each member each week.
2. That the elder be a spiritual leader and good example of Christ in the church.
3. Identify and resource momentum in ministry. The first thirty minutes of session is spent identifying momentum and figuring out how to leverage it (identifying and resourcing everything that is growing in the church).

Because of the unique response of this pastor, there will be a case study on what he is attempting to do in his congregation (see below).

The second pastor said that his church has moved away from the administrative session (the session seeing to the administrative nuts and bolts of the church) to being the spiritual leaders of the church. It is no longer assumed that all of the session would serve or chair committees anymore. The elders set vision and make sure all of the activities and everything the church does moves in the direction of the vision of the church. The key roles for this session are to pray, read Scripture, discern God's will for the congregation, create the vision, communicate that to the congregation, and make sure everything is working toward that vision.

### ***The Type of Training That Pastors Are Doing***

Three of six pastors who were interviewed were for the first time working on putting in place elder training in their church (they had been at their current call for a year or less). Four of six pastors were planning or planned to have multiple training sessions in their elder training. One pastor planned to have a big-name pastor come in and lead a retreat for their elders and deacons. One pastor has leadership training every other month and has all those who are interested or called to session to attend those leadership training sessions before they are approached by the nominating committee. For the pastors who have multiple training sessions after the elders are elected, they range from three to six sessions, and they all have aspects of faith, polity, and duties of the session in one format or another. Two of the pastors had special all-day or weekend events where special speakers were invited in to teach.

One pastor was clear that he gave out resources for the elders to read and study. The information in the resources was not taught, but the elders were responsible on their

own to study and learn from it. One resource is most commonly used, but other resources also are being used.

### ***Resources Pastors Use for Training***

The first book that most but not all of the pastors use in training is the Book of Order, the constitutional documents of the church and other denominational resources. They use the Book of Order and the Book of Confessions. Other resources being used are *Making Disciples, Making Leaders* by Steve Eason; *Presbyterian Elder: An Essential Guide* by Earl Johnson;<sup>7</sup> *The Art of Neighboring* by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon; *Growing Local Missionaries* by Dan Steigerwald; and *Not Your Parents' Offering Plate* by Clif Christopher. All of these books have different focuses. Pastors also used denominational resources such as church planning resources.

One of the pastors who was changing the model of elder leader to spiritual leaders of the church still had a major focus on learning the Book of Order. Of all the resource mentioned, the Bible was mentioned once. One pastor said that was the most important resource: that elders have to know and study the Bible because it is the key to leadership. It is interesting that the Bible is considered the revealed Word of God, but it was listed only once as a resource that pastors use to train elders. Perhaps it was omitted because it was assumed that the Bible was read readily by all the elders and therefore did not need to be mentioned. Or it may be that the Bible was not considered important in the training

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<sup>7</sup> See chapter 3 for a discussion.



of elders in the church. This might be a follow-up conversation with the pastors or a topic for future study.<sup>8</sup>

### Unique Way to Train Elders: A Case Study on the Pastoral Interviews

Two of the pastors interviewed had changed the vision of elders from administrators to spiritual leaders of the congregation. One pastoral interview stood out from the rest. This pastor is a pastor of a congregation with membership in the three hundreds and has been pastor of the church for around three years. The church is about twenty-five years old.

The heart of this thesis-project started with the idea “Why don’t we train people in the church and then from those trained elect them to leadership?” As the project morphed, it moved into an exploratory study on first-time elder leadership. When this pastor told what he was doing to train and develop elder leadership in the church, it became clear this approach was unique and different.

In this congregation, in order to be considered or nominated as an elder people would have had to attend leadership development classes at the church. This means they already would have received training before they would be considered for nomination as an elder. The nominating committee checked to see if that person had taken the time and commitment to attend any of the six leadership training events per year. These leadership training events take place every other month, and they talk about the polity of the church (this would include the Book of Order and what it means to be Presbyterian), what it means to be a spiritual leader according to the letter to Titus (see chapter 2 and the

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<sup>8</sup> A follow up question might be “What role does the Bible play in elder training and how much during training, continued training, or mentoring is it used?”

discussion on Titus), general leadership development, and discerning spiritual gifts. More topics will be added because these leadership training events just started this year. Other than providing the training that people need to become elders in the church, these events find the people who are highly committed (they attend the events) and would make good leaders (those who have excelled through the training). There were multiple times when pastors mentioned the time commitment of elders and all that they had to do for the church. These people show they will take the commitment seriously because they have already taken the time to come to training before they are elected.<sup>9</sup> By having this training before the elders are elected, elder training after election is simple and quick (everything that most pastors are training elders to do they are learning before they are elected).

Another change that this church has made is in the session and responsibilities. All of the other pastors listed the nuts and bolts of the church as the key responsibility of the session. By contrast, this church asks its elders to do three things: pray, be examples, and leverage momentum (see above). Whereas many congregations expect the elders to chair their committees, this church has taken that responsibility from the elders and have the elders serve on the committees.

The session has also changed from meeting twelve times a year to only six times a year. The other six months, the elders meet in triads to pray for each other and the congregation. The triads are to provide prayer, support, mentoring, and encouragement for the elders. The elders are also responsible for part of the small group ministry; they are asked to either host or facilitate a small group in the church. The church has taken the

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<sup>9</sup> One pastor backed out of this research study because he did not want his elders to take the time to fill out the survey.

small-group ministry seriously and had nineteen small groups for the last small-group study.

The key resource is the Bible. This pastor continually brought home that one of the keys to elder training is having the elders know and continually study the Bible. “Ninety Days Through the Bible” was one way he encouraged his elders (and congregation) to study and read through the Bible. He also used *Not Your Parents’ Offering Plate* by Clif Christopher.

The final thought of this pastor is, “[The] most important thing you can do for the elders is make them read the Bible.”<sup>10</sup>

The second pastor who has elders as spiritual leaders and not administrators stated this repeatedly. He says that too many sessions have a flawed model of equipping that focuses too much on administrative models. He makes clear that he thought the administrative model of elders is not biblical. He believes strongly that elders are spiritual heads of the congregation and exegetical community and leads the church in that direction.

This pastor also says that too many times churches have large sessions; the idea is that as the church grows the church needs more elders to represent the congregation. He says that elders do not represent the people in the church. Instead, they listen to God’s calling and do God’s will. A larger church does not need more elders to hear God’s will for the church. This pastor’s goal in an eight-hundred-member church is to have nine elders. He is moving from fourteen elders to twelve elders this year.

This research has shown a dichotomy of how sessions should be run. Should elders be administrators, or should elders be spiritual leaders of the church and let others

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<sup>10</sup> Pastor A, phone call, personal interview with author, December 4, 2015.

be the administrators of the church? Is there a happy medium, or does it have to be one way or the other?

### A Special-Case Scenario of Elders on a Session

In one interview, the pastor had a special situation. When he became pastor of the church, there was no session because the church was under an Administrative Council of Presbytery.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, one of his roles was to restart the session. This required him to elect a full slate of elders<sup>12</sup> all at once, whereas most churches have three-year rotating terms so that each year only one-third of session is elected and replaced. This situation had all six elders coming on board at the same time.

Through this unique situation, the pastor had extensive training to get the session rebooted. The keys to this retraining were to go back through the Book of Order to learn and study why and what was required, but really to learn to discern God's direction for the church. One of the major goals of the retraining was to bring the session back to a much more spiritual side, to be spiritual leaders of the church. This pastor commented that we are not put into our place because of great business skills but only through prayer and conversation. Before the Administrative Commission was put in place, the previous session was always arguing. Therefore, part of this training was to stop and pray through sensitive subjects so that arguing would not be a part of the session.

This special training for elders included ninety-minute sessions twice a week for six weeks. This was the most extensive training of its type of all the pastors who were

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<sup>11</sup> The church was about to close, the session was so toxic it was no longer effective, and so the Presbytery disbanded the session and set up an Administrative Council to run the church until decisions could be made about the future of the church.

<sup>12</sup> The church has six ruling elders.

interviewed. This was the only pastor who served as an elder on session before his call into ministry. Speaking of his experience as an elder on session, he said it was the “ugliest spiritual experience [he has] ever had.”<sup>13</sup> Now his goal is to have session as a spirituality class. He wants the elders to have a deeper spiritual walk from being in session. This includes helping them grow in their prayer and spiritual lives.

### Mentoring Elders

Three of six pastors said there was mentoring for elders of the church. Two pastors said the elders were mentored by the pastor himself. One pastor especially took time to mentor all of the elders, not just the new elders. He said he really wanted to get to know all of them very well on a personal level. He wanted the elders on session to grow spiritually through their time of serving on session. One church had the session meet only six times a year, and the other six months of the year the session members would gather in triads, which was a time of mentoring for the elders.

### Continued Leadership Training

Three of six pastors have scheduled continued training for elders when they are serving on session. There was a wide variety of continuing education of elders. Continuing education varied from every other month during the time of normal session meetings when a triad of elders got together, to having two months a year (January and February) for training, to every session including training, to session retreats, to events with special guests teaching, to having the elders lead small groups in the church, to the elders going through “awakening” and then leading the congregation through the

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<sup>13</sup> Pastor E, phone call, personal interview with author, December 10, 2015.

“awakening.”

The three pastors who did not have ongoing leadership training for their elders were very interested but have not put it together yet. They all realized the importance for it. The three pastors who talked the most about the pastors being the spiritual head of the church all wanted the elders to focus their continuing education on prayer, spiritual life, Bible reading, and small groups. Once again this shows a contrast between the administrative expectations of elders and the expectations of the elders being the spiritual heads of the church.

### **Conclusion**

The experience of interviewing the six pastors was informative. All of the pastors were very talkative and enjoyed talking about their calling and their ministry.

All six pastors interviewed have been at their churches for less than five years, and all six pastors said that the churches they are serving did not have any elder training before they arrived at the church. This means that all six churches have started elder training in the last five years.

All pastors interviewed noticed the necessity of elder training. And yet all six pastors did (or planned to do) elder training in different ways. There are two major ways to view the session. One view is that elders are the administrators of the church (this approach is talked about in length in the Book of Order, when it talks about all of the duties and responsibilities of the session). The truth is that all of the administration of the church has to be done, and because the session is the ruling body of the church, it has to make sure that administrative tasks are done.

The other view is that elders are the spiritual heads of the church. In churches that focus more on this view, other non-session members take care of most of the administrative duties and have the elders focus on the spiritual side, the large-picture issues of direction of the church, and leading small groups. The Book of Order also talks about elders being the spiritual guides of the church, but there is much less focus on that aspect. Is there a middle ground between these two elder models? Is there a way to be spiritual heads and also administrators? From these surveys it would appear the church has elders as either spiritual leaders or administrators.

It will be very difficult to have standardized training for elders in the Presbyterian Church unless every church has a common goal or idea of what elders need to be like. The best way to train elders will differ depending on which goal a church is working toward: spiritual leaders, administrators, or some combination of the two.

The next step of this process is to see what is happening with the elders. The pastors all believe that training of elders is important. Chapter 5 will look at whether elders are being trained, how effective that training is, and what the elders feel their jobs are. The chapter also will examine how things could be done better, including the research for this project and development of this topic for future studies.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### **The Gap Between the Pastors and the Elders**

Of the pastors interviewed for this project (see chapter 4) all six pastors agree it is important for elders to be trained. Yet out of 35 respondents of the elder survey, 54 percent said they were not formally trained, and 5 percent said that they did not know. Only 40 percent said they were formally trained. The results of this question of the survey changed as elders from different churches responded. Until elders from the last two churches took the survey, the results stayed at 70 percent of elders who said they were not trained. The responses from the last two churches changed the percentage from 70 percent who were not trained to 54 percent.<sup>1</sup>

Elders from last two churches who took the survey had the two pastors who have been in their current church the longest. Therefore they have the most established elder training. This includes the church that was under the administrative council, where the pastor had all six elders elected and trained together. Without these two churches, the data might have been very different. The data show that each church is very different.

Where is the gap? All pastors think elder training is good, and all pastors are either putting together or have put together elder training in their congregation. That the last two churches that responded were also the churches that appeared to have the most elders who were trained might show that the longer pastors who train elders are in the church, more elders will be trained.

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<sup>1</sup> It was assumed that these last two churches were the last group to respond because they were given the link to the survey three days after the previous church to respond.



### What Training the Elders Received

Of the twelve elders who responded to the question “In terms of the training you received, indicate all of the things that it included,” 50 percent responded that they were asked to attend a single training event and 50 percent said that they were asked to attend multiple session training events. Eight out of twelve responded they were asked to read a book, and four of twelve said they were mentored by an experienced elder. For effectiveness of the training, 33 percent said the training was very effective. Another 41 percent said the training was somewhat effective, and 24 percent said it was a little effective or not effective. One out of four said the training was a little effective or less, and only one of three though it was very effective. One hopes pastors can do something increase those statistics so the majority of elders in training think it is very effective.

There is also a gap in how effective elders thought the training was compared with how prepared were they to be an elder when they first became one. Only 23 percent of the elders who responded (thirty total responses) said they were very prepared. This compared with 33 percent who answered they were a little prepared or not prepared to carry out the responsibility of an elder.

Even the best training will not mean much unless the elders reap the benefits of the training. The best teachers can present material, the best books can be read, but none of that means much unless the elders are being training and feel prepared to take on the roles they have in the church.

Four of the respondents said that they were mentored in their training. All four of them responded that they were either very prepared (two) or somewhat prepared (two); this means that all who were mentored were in the top level of preparedness for being an

elder. When they were asked about the effectiveness of training, they thought it was either very effective (two) or somewhat effective (two). Mentoring appears to be a key element in elder training.

It would have been helpful to be able to conduct a follow-up, semi-structured interview with some of these elders to determine more exactly what parts of their training helped the most and what parts of their training was not helpful. It would have been useful also to have some interviews with the elders after talking to their pastors; it then would be possible to compare what training the pastors said elders received with what the elders thought they received.

#### What the Elders Said Their Jobs Are

Twenty-nine elders answered the question “What have been your key responsibilities serving as an elder?” Twenty-six elders listed administrative roles in the church. Only one replied, “spiritual development.” One responded, “I personally feel serving members who are going through difficult situations has been my main responsibility.” And one person responded, “Only just elected and truly start my term in January 2016.” The other twenty-six respondents listed committees, meetings, session, and administrative tasks as the roles that are most important for session.

This might be the most revealing part of the research. Three of the pastors interviewed mentioned elders being spiritual leaders of the church as being key; two of those pastors have changed their sessions to make them less of an administrative board and more the spiritual leaders of the church.

This response shows a gap between what the pastors want the elders to be and what the elders see themselves as doing. There will always be issues if the pastor's view of the elder and the elder's view of the elder differ. This would be one area that needs to be addressed, discussed, or further researched.

#### What the Elders Thought Was Not Helpful in Training

There were only eight responses on what the elders did not find helpful (out of fourteen who said that they received formal training), so six did not respond. Of those eight responses, three were positive about the training; they mentioned nothing that was not helpful. One person said reading the book was not helpful. Of the five true responses, one respondent said that very little emphasis was placed on the biblical qualifications. One respondent wished elders would have learned more about the churches' relationship to the presbytery. Two respondents commented that the training was helpful but nothing compared with being on session.

This last response brings up a reason of not having formal training for elders that they would learn more and better just by being on session. With the normal rotation of three classes of elders", one-third of new elders each year would have to learn on the job. This was not brought up at any other place in the study, and no pastor or elder mentioned it other than in these responses. The conclusion to what the elders thought was not helpful is that for the most part the elders appreciated the training and thought it valuable (excluding the respondents listed above). A more helpful way to ask this question in the future is a checkbox, "I thought all of the training was helpful." For this study it is assumed that if the question was not answered, then the training was all helpful, which

means most of the elders who were trained thought it was all helpful. Again, even if the training was helpful but did not prepare the elder to be an elder, then there is a gap and an issue that needs to be resolved.

### What the Elders Thought Could Have Been Done Better in Training

The intent of asking this question was to discern if all of the elders thought there was a blazing common theme that should be included in the training but was not. This is not the case, but some good points that did come out of the responses. Twenty-seven responses were given for this question, and two people had no suggestions. So there were twenty-five suggestions. Almost half (twelve out of twenty-five) wanted clarity about the responsibilities and expectations of elders. Four of those respondents specifically mentioned they wish they had a job description. This is a concerning response, because it means half of the elders who responded to this question did not know what they were getting into when they said they would be an elder. More than that, even after the training they still did not have a clear picture. Is this because the role of an elder is all-encompassing, or that no one has taken the time to figure out what an elder actually does? Or are churches so disorganized that no one really knows what elders do? Or do the pastors know what the elders' responsibility is? This might also be a hindrance in putting together training for elders. If there is no job description or understanding, then it will be very hard to train people to fulfill the roles. Defining what their roles are might be the first step into putting together effective elder training. This should also be the first step in asking if someone would serve as an elder: giving a specific job description and fully explaining all of the responsibilities that it would entail before someone would accept the

call to serve. If this is not done, then people might accept a call to serve and later realize it is not their gift or they did not have the time or skills to fulfill the roles that would be expected of them.

A second theme that elders want to learn more about in training is polity, church government, and the structure of the church. It is also cause for concern that of the twenty-five respondents, nine wanted to know more about the polity, church government, and structure of the church. Four respondents specifically wanted more training in the Book of Order. Elders are leaders of the church and therefore should know this information even more thoroughly than do other members of the congregation. A reflection about this question is that the pastors may try not to worry the elders about polity, but that is not very Presbyterian and more hierarchical than Presbyterian.

Four of the respondents wanted more time as the session to get to know their fellow session members before serving. This does show that a few elders look beyond administrative tasks and see relationships as being important to serving as an elder. This could also point to a desire to be mentored and have a mentoring relationship with someone who is already serving as an elder. There could be some interesting follow-up questions about this.

Mentoring was also mentioned five times in responses, both mentoring by the pastor and mentoring by experienced elders. It would have been helpful at this point to know what church these respondents are from, because three of the six pastors who were surveyed mentioned that they did have mentoring set up in the training and continued training. Are all five respondents from a congregation where mentoring was a part of the curriculum, and the elders missed it? One of those respondents did say they were

mentored in the elder training but here was specifically asking for mentoring by the pastor himself. Mentoring is a key to leadership training. It was the method that Jesus used. Paul also mentored young leaders like Timothy, so it appears to be the biblical model of elder training.

Two respondents need special attention. The first of these wrote a very large paragraph about how the presbytery should be involved in training elders and standardizing the roles and responsibilities of the elders, and should be in charge of training. This particular elder thinks that the training needs to start with the senior pastor, because pastors “tend to become very entitled” and operate according to church policies and not for the good of the church. This respondent also thinks that the presbytery needs to step in and regulate policies and procedures that the church abides by. There is an obvious issue with this elder in this church that no other elder has mentioned. But some thoughts and ideas should be discussed in conjunction with this response. What is the role of the presbytery in the training of elders, if any? Is there any way to standardize training for the elders? What responsibility has the presbytery regarding the relationship between the pastor and the elders?

First, what can or should the presbytery do in elder training? For many reasons, it would be hard for the presbytery to be involved in the training of elders. First, there is no standard for what elders do. As was discussed in chapter 4, there are two major themes in how the elders of the church are viewed: as administrators or as spiritual leaders of the church. This would be a question that has to be determined. Second, then job descriptions would be constant in every church. The problem is that every church is unique and has

unique gifts and ministries that are not going to be constant at every church.<sup>2</sup> It is hard to have universal training when each church is so unique. In addition, presbytery budgets are being cut, and so less and less is happening at the presbytery level. Further, a major theological divide in the PCUSA makes it very difficult for churches to work together. The presbytery of ECO does not have paid denominational staff, so training would be difficult to provide unless churches banded together to train their elders. It might be a very good idea to pool resources.

Some elders feel that even though they might be receiving elder training, some changes could make the training more efficient. This shows a gap between so many respondents feeling prepared for service and yet so many respondents not knowing what type of service they are getting into.

### **Areas in Which the Study Could Have Been More Detailed**

#### **The Demographics of the Elders**

The elders in the Presbyterian churches in south Florida are mostly over fifty years old (77 percent), and the other 22 percent of the elders who responded are between thirty-six and forty-nine. No elders under the age of thirty-six are serving. It can be assumed by talking to the pastors that a couple of elders do not email and therefore were not given this survey.<sup>3</sup> In the Old Testament,<sup>4</sup> elder were persons in the community who were old and wise. These demographics are biblical. But are they constitutional to the Presbyterian Church, where the elders are supposed to be representative of the

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<sup>2</sup> This includes but is not limited to each church having its own committee structure, committees, and programs. One church might or might not have deacons, which would affect the roles of the elders.

<sup>3</sup> One of the downfalls of this survey is that it was offered only online. To make this research more complete, in the future a paper survey could be offered to those who do not use email.

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 2.

congregation? This is unclear from the study. To know if this was representative of the congregation, there would need to be data from the church about the age range of the congregation. There could be an age gap in leadership in the Presbyterian church.<sup>5</sup>

### How Elder Training Could Be Standardized

It would appear to be easier if elder training in the Presbyterian church could be standardized. There are many issues facing this idea. First is the dichotomy of elder as spiritual leader and elder as administrator of the church. In chapter 2, the biblical roles of elders were spelled out, and nowhere in that list were any committees mentioned. Scripture indicates that the role of elder is more of teaching, evangelizing, and discernment, which includes rebuking when necessary.<sup>6</sup> But when the Bible was written, the church was in its infancy. There was no church building or grounds to take care of, the parents were in charge of Christian education in their own homes, children were at home (so there was no preschool committee), Paul was a tentmaker (so there was no pastor to hire or fire and no need of a personnel committee). However, Acts 6:1-3 shows the first distraction the elders of the church faced and how they dealt with it:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty."

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<sup>5</sup> It would be interesting to find if there is a generation leadership gap in the church and if or how this affects how the younger generation views the church and the leaders of the church. These data could be compared with that of churches where the younger generations worship regularly and attract younger generations.

<sup>6</sup> Please see the conclusion of chapter 4 for list of biblical responsibilities of elders.



The elders set a precedent in Acts 6: the most important thing they do is preaching the word. They decided to appoint others to the important task of caring for widows. Running the church is important, and there is no need to diminish that. But the precedent is set; the leaders of the early church would have appointed others to fulfill this task. Therefore elders' main responsibility is making sure the gospel is proclaimed. The argument could be made that having elders administer the church makes gospel proclamation easier. However, the interviews with pastors and the responses from elders show that elders are doing only administrative work.

As was mentioned in chapter 4, two pastors have attempted to make this change. In their interviews, the pastors said this was quite a change from what was already happening in the church and required a lot of work to make it happen. (Does the training of the elders properly reflect the major change in the roles of the elders? The Book of Order does not!) Biblical leaders are spiritual leaders. But only one of the pastors mentioned that it was vital for elders to know the Bible. Where some responses from the elders mentioned a desire to be more spiritually mature (for example, they mentioned being more prepared to teach or pray), none of the elders said they wish the training included more Bible study, or that they were not prepared because they did not know the Bible well enough. A question is, "Should the Bible be the main curriculum in preparing people to be elders in the church?" In the qualifications for elders, it is stated they must be spiritually mature. This spiritual maturity comes through knowing and obeying Scripture, so studying the Bible is (or should be) a requirement for elders.

### **Other Ways This Study Could Have Been Improved Upon**

During their interviews pastors mentioned that some elders do not have email. There were a few discussions on how to facilitate the surveys to the elders. The first aspect that could have been improved on would have been to also prepare a paper survey for the elders who do not email or use computers so they could have participated.

The second major discussion about the survey was how to collect some of the data. Should the elders be provided with a list of things that they could select describing their job descriptions, and what they wish the training would have included? It was decided to leave a box for the elders to fill in for themselves what they thought, not prompting them to get a clearer picture of what they were thinking. This method did work well for compiling the key responsibilities for the session. Twenty-nine out of thirty-five people responded, and because they were not guided or prompted it was evident that the administrative tasks were most clear. If most of the elders had an option to select administrative tasks and spiritual leaders, they probably also would have chosen spiritual leaders, because they probably know that they should. But not giving options offered insight into the minds of the elders. It might have been helpful to have click boxes for the elders to select from that would have asked about the kinds of training. It would have been possible to populate this list from the semi-structured pastor interviews, research, and suggestions about new training.

It also would have been helpful to differentiate between elders who were trained by the pastor who is currently serving and those who were not. How would their responses be different? Future research could leverage these questions and line of thought more.

It would have been helpful to semi-structured interviews with a few of the elders. These interviews could have explored some of these topics more and answered more of the questions that have been left at the end of the survey. It also would have shown more of the attitude of the elders, which cannot be conveyed in an online survey.

In studying the responsibilities of the elders, it would have been helpful to know if the church has a board of deacons or not. If a church does not have a board of deacons, then the elders might be required to take on duties that would otherwise be given to deacons. This question could have been asked of the pastors and the elders.

There also should have been questions asking about the biblical qualifications of elders and how they are fulfilling them. Also, the pastors should be asked how they view the biblical qualifications of elders and if they think the elders are meeting biblical qualifications. One of those qualifications is not to be a recent convert. It would have been helpful to know when the elders were elected and how long they have been Christians, to see if churches are relying on recent converts to be spiritual leaders.

### **Where to Go from Here**

Multiple studies could come from this project. Following more study, there will be hard steps to put all of this into practice. The work will be to define the role of the elder and put that in writing so a job description can be created. This in itself might be a future project or study to be done. When a job description is created, then training should be adapted to train the elders to fulfill the job description. Further study should be done to see if the elder job description and the training match, and if the training is making elders prepared (or feel prepared) for the roles that were decided on in the job description. This

is a fluid process because job descriptions might continually change. In turn, training will have to change and adapt.

Pastors in the Presbyterian Church are all seminary trained. They spend three years to become a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church. There are ruling elders serving today who have received no training. If the Presbyterian Church is truly a church of the middle way, where lay people are active in the leadership of the church, then the elders of the Presbyterian Church need to be highly trained spiritual leaders, and qualified. The elders need to have a high spiritual calling and be above reproach.<sup>7</sup> Seminaries should spend time working with pastors in the administrative side of church work, and in how to elect, train, and work with elders. Every pastor needs a theology on eldership before starting in the church, because without a theology of eldership it is impossible to work with the session and train future sessions. From this theology of elders and what their roles should be, then a pastor can start to work with elders, selecting and training them.

### What Should Elder Training Look Like?

The Bible says elders are to rule, govern and judge; to discipline; to work, not merely to be in an honorary position; to rebuke sin; to witness Jesus to the world; to shepherd themselves and the people; to love, teach, preach, disciple, pray (which includes laying on hands and praying for the sick); to take care of offerings and gifts; to deal with doctrinal issues; to rebuke false doctrine; to oppose and silence those teaching the wrong message; to guard themselves and the people; to worship; to replace themselves (i.e.,

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<sup>7</sup> See the biblical qualifications in chapter 2.

teach and prepare others to lead); and to lead by example.<sup>8</sup> Yet if elders view themselves solely as the administrators of the church, there must be a drastic change in the church in what the elders are called to do. This might take having the elders for a time not serving on committees, or limiting their serving on committees. This might include the elders being put in teaching roles, leading small groups, or learning to share their testimonies during worship.

### Changing from Administrators to Spiritual Leaders

This seems like a daunting task when elders are seen and see themselves—and are probably more comfortable—with being administrators. As was discussed in chapter 1, Elder Leader Institute (ELI) strives to help elders become spiritual leaders. ELI is not meant to be training before the elders serve, but to help those elders who are already serving become the spiritual leaders of the church. This type of process would be a way to incorporate future elders before they are elected. Instead of electing people and then trying to train them to be spiritual leaders, it would be appropriate to build up spiritual leaders in the church and then elect the elders from those spiritual leaders.

### Recommendations

The PCUSA needs to eliminate the term “ruling elder” and bring back elders and pastors. This term “ruling elder” encourages elders to be administrators of the church. The church needs to regain the spiritual nature of the office of elder. This is probably the most important thing for the church to do. This might include a time when complete

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<sup>8</sup> From chapter 2 conclusion.

focus is on spiritual life and discipline for the elders of the church, and others are delegated responsibility for administrative tasks of the church.

Pastors need to present a clear vision of what an elder is, so that everyone understands and follows:

1. That pastors decide on their theology of elder leadership in the church, and from there teach and lead the session to be the elders they are called to be by God.<sup>9</sup>
2. That elders might become the spiritual leaders of the church alongside the pastors, thus changing the landscape of elderhood from the administration of the church to the teachers and spiritual mentors of the church.
3. That elders might receive in-depth training before they are elected to office.<sup>10</sup> This training should be specific to what the elders' roles and responsibilities are.
4. That there is continued training and discipleship for elders of the church.
5. That the elders are mentored. It would even be best to mentor them before they are elected.
6. That seminaries train pastors in lay elder leadership.
7. That a resource or open source is available for pastors to see what type of leadership training other pastors are doing, what type of resources are being used, and how the training is going.

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<sup>9</sup> Administrative responsibilities must be taken care of in the church. The church would not function without them being done. The apparent key is to have the spiritual leaders of the church taking care of the administrative responsibilities. The follow-up study might be trying to find the right balance between making an elder spiritual, on one end of the spectrum, or administrative, on the other. Both are necessary in the church, and a good balance must be found.

<sup>10</sup> See chapter 4 for the case study on one of the pastor's interviews.

8. That there is a lifestyle covenant for elders. Nowhere in this surveys was lifestyle mentioned. But the Bible is clear that a certain type of lifestyle is required for elders. (A couple of pastors did mention talking about the biblical qualifications for elders, but no one has mentioned a covenant.) A covenant would help the elders realize the importance of following Scripture and obeying.<sup>11</sup>

There are many ways to improve elder training. This study has only scratched the surface of this topic. It would be in the best interest of the universal church to take time to study and explore how best to have lay leaders following biblical principles as they lead the church today.

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<sup>11</sup> As the author was finishing this thesis, looking at the results, and comparing them with the rest of the thesis, the idea came that God seems to care greatly on the lifestyle of those who are serving as leaders in the church. Calvin echoed this especially with the yearly review. The idea behind this yearly review came from the idea that once elders are elected in leadership, they will commit to live the lifestyle as best they could to honor Jesus Christ. This idea of a lifestyle covenant has not been discussed in the thesis up to this point. It is a topic that would need to be discussed and researched more, but for the scope of this project, which was an exploratory study, it will not be fleshed out or discussed farther.

## APPENDIX 1

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR PASTORS

#### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

How are elders trained for leadership?

##### Introductory Statement to Interviewee

My purpose in contacting you at this time is to ask some questions regarding elders who serve in your church. As you might be aware, I'm pursuing a Doctorate of Ministry degree at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. One requirement is to complete a thesis-project. I have chosen to study how various ministries train or prepare new elders for serving the church.

The interview should take no longer than 30 minutes of your time. With your permission, I would like to take notes of the conversation so that I don't miss capturing all of your comments. In order to conduct this interview I need your permission that you are a voluntary participant in this project and understand that you can choose not answer any question you wish or discontinue the interview at any time. In addition, the information you contribute will remain anonymous. Your name will not be associated with any of the statements you provide.

##### Proposed Questions

###### **Personal**

Could you tell me how long you have been serving in ministry and some of the positions you have held?

[Add any additional demographic or personal information questions that you believe would be helpful.]

###### **General Questions about Elders in the Church**

How many elders do you have in the church and what are some of the responsibilities that they are given?

- What percentage of your current elders have served longer than 5 years?
- How often do you have new elders join the board who have never previously served in that capacity?



- Do you find that elders typically serve several terms before discontinuing that role?

What training, if any, do new elders receive when they begin to serve in that capacity for the first time?

- Are there specific materials or books that you recommend new elders read?
- Is there a statement of faith that you require a new elder to abide by in order to become an elder?
- What are the key elements being taught in the training or preparation of new elders?
- Would a new elder be mentored by a senior elder or by the pastor?
  - o If so, how long would this mentorship last?
    - Is the mentorship informal, or does it attempt to train new elders using a consistent or regular set of materials?
- If there is training for new elders, what feedback have you received regarding how they respond to it? In other words, do you hear from new elders that the training was helpful in preparing them to serve the church?
- Do you believe that elders should receive formal training to prepare them for service?
- Does your ministry provide any ongoing training for more experienced elders who have already been serving in that capacity? If so, could you describe some of the things that go into the training?

Is there anything else you would like to mention that you would like for me to consider?

[Thank the pastor for taking the time to answer these questions.]

END OF QUESTIONS

Please note any unusual circumstances (e.g., the pastor was interrupted to attend to some urgent matter) that occurred during the interview that should be kept in mind for the assessment.

## APPENDIX 2

### ONLINE SURVEY TO ELDERS

#### Elder Preparedness

Principal Investigator: Carter Robinson, Doctoral student, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Massachusetts

This questionnaire is designed to briefly explore your thoughts and attitudes regarding your preparedness to serve as an elder. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The information collected will be used in a doctoral thesis project. This is an anonymous survey and the information will be kept strictly confidential. Any information you provide will be grouped with responses from other participants to ensure anonymity. By completing this questionnaire, you have given your consent that you are a voluntary participant in this study.

1. Are you currently serving as an elder in a church?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

2. Approximately how many years have you served as an elder?

- ☐ 0 years -- I have never been an elder
- ☐ 1 year or less -- I'm a new elder and this is my first year
- ☐ 2 - 3 years
- ☐ 4 - 6 years
- ☐ more than 6 years

3. What is your age?

- ☐ 18 - 25 years
- ☐ 26 - 35 years
- ☐ 36 - 50 years
- ☐ over 50 years

4. When you became an elder for the first time, did you receive any formal training?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

## Elder Preparedness

5. In terms of the training you received, indicate all of the things that it included.

- ☐ I was mentored by an experienced elder
- ☐ asked to read a book
- ☐ asked to attend a single training session
- ☐ asked to attend multiple training sessions

Other (please specify)

6. Rate how effective the training was for preparing you to carry out the responsibilities of an elder.

- ☐ Not effective at all
- ☐ A little effective
- ☐ Somewhat effective
- ☐ Very effective

7. What aspect or part of the training did you find not all that helpful?

8. When you became an elder for the first time, overall, how prepared did you feel to carry out the responsibilities of an elder?

- ☐ Not prepared at all
- ☐ A little prepared
- ☐ Somewhat prepared
- ☐ Very prepared

9. What have been your key responsibilities serving as an elder?

10. What responsibilities for an elder did you feel most prepared to carryout?

11. What responsibilities for an elder did you feel least prepared to carryout?

12. What would you suggest be part of a training program for new elders in order to make it really effective?

13. During the time you have served as an elder, did the church provide you with on-going training to help you conduct your responsibilities?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Unsure

14. What kinds of training did the church provide even after you had served for longer than a year?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

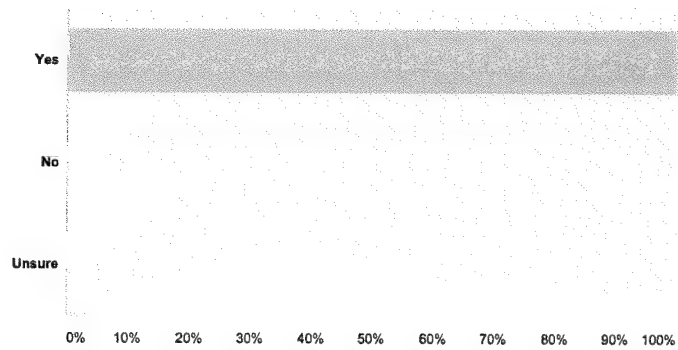
## APPENDIX 3

### RESULTS OF THE ONLINE SURVEY TO ELDERS

#### Elder Preparedness

##### Q1 Are you currently serving as an elder in a church?

Answered: 35 Skipped: 0

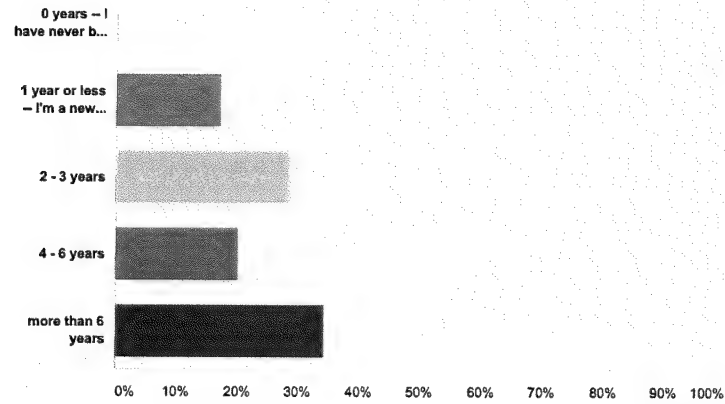


Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	100.00%	35
No	0.00%	0
Unsure	0.00%	0
Total		35

## Elder Preparedness

### Q2 Approximately how many years have you served as an elder?

Answered: 35 Skipped: 0

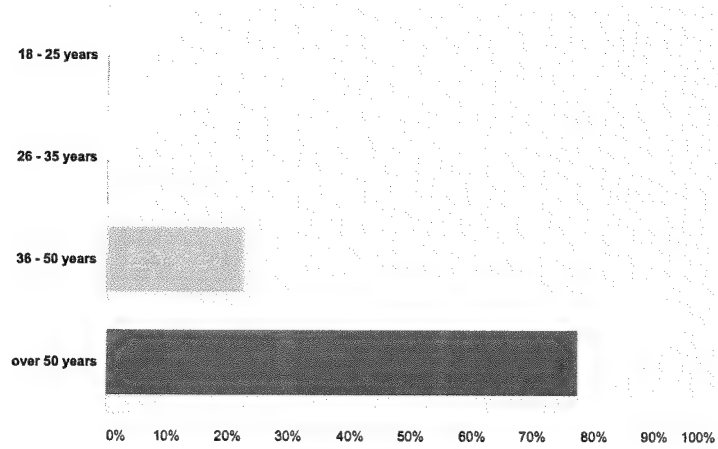


Answer Choices	Responses
0 years — I have never been an elder	0.00% 0
1 year or less — I'm a new elder and this is my first year	17.14% 6
2 - 3 years	28.57% 10
4 - 6 years	20.00% 7
more than 6 years	34.29% 12
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>

## Elder Preparedness

### Q3 What is your age?

Answered: 35 Skipped: 0

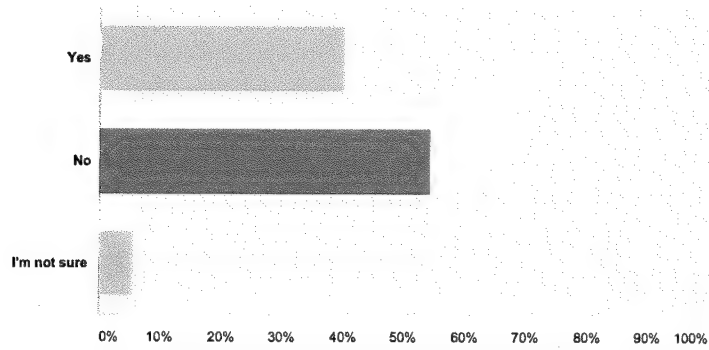


Answer Choices	Responses	
18 - 25 years	0.00%	0
26 - 35 years	0.00%	0
36 - 50 years	22.86%	8
over 50 years	77.14%	27
Total		35

## Elder Preparedness

### Q4 When you became an elder for the first time, did you receive any formal training?

Answered: 35 Skipped: 0



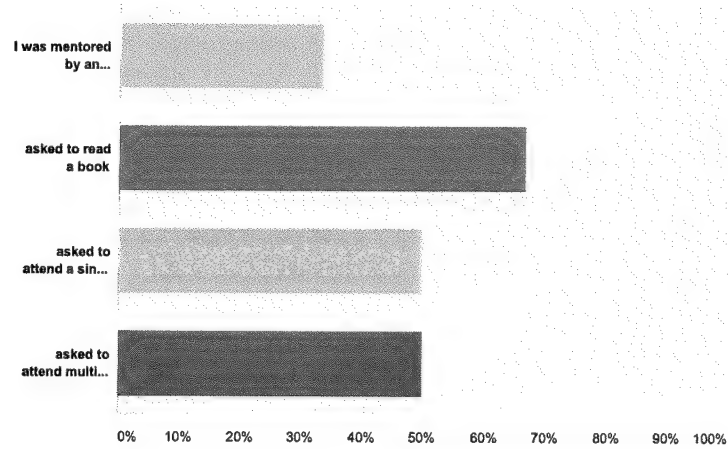
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	40.00%	14
No	54.29%	19
I'm not sure	5.71%	2
Total		35



## Elder Preparedness

### Q5 In terms of the training you received, indicate all of the things that it included.

Answered: 12 Skipped: 23

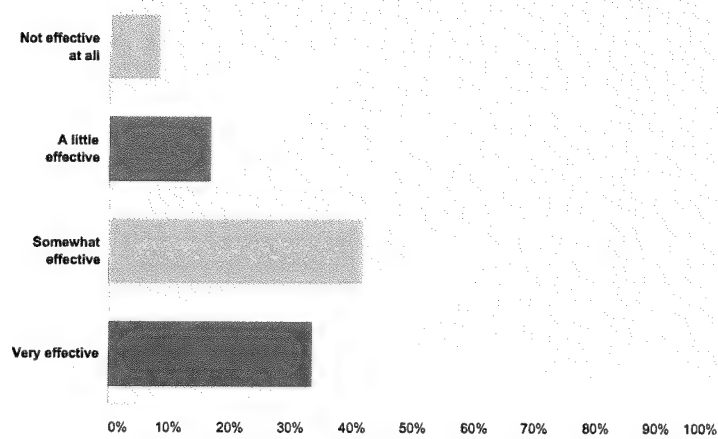


Answer Choices		Responses	
	I was mentored by an experienced elder	33.33%	4
	asked to read a book	66.67%	8
	asked to attend a single training session	50.00%	6
	asked to attend multiple training sessions	50.00%	6
Total Respondents: 12			
#	Other (please specify)	Date	
	There are no responses.		

# Elder Preparedness

## Q6 Rate how effective the training was for preparing you to carry out the responsibilities of an elder.

Answered: 12 Skipped: 23



Answer Choices	Responses
Not effective at all	8.33% 1
A little effective	16.67% 2
Somewhat effective	41.67% 5
Very effective	33.33% 4
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>

# Elder Preparedness

## **Q7 What aspect or part of the training did you find not all that helpful?**

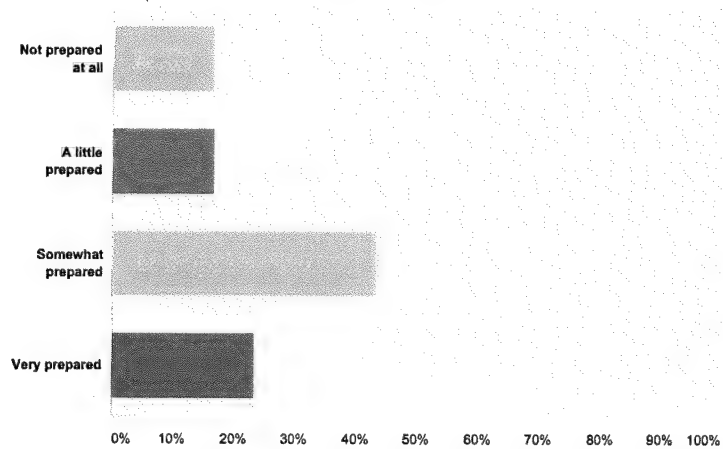
Answered: 8 Skipped: 27

#	Responses	Date
1	reading the book	12/12/2015 8:40 PM
2	It was all helpful, the best "training" was being on the Session and learning that way.	12/12/2015 10:00 AM
3	1. The training did not include the sessions relationship with the Presbytery, what the Presbytery's role was and how the Presbytery monitored and ensured the health of the local church and its adherence to the book of order and church policy. 2. The Sr. Pastor made a major point of saying if you as an Elder disagreed with the way things were run that you should resign quietly and not make a fuss. I feel he had good reason to say this as many long standing unhealthy practices were in effect and still are.	12/11/2015 11:56 AM
4	It all helped. But nothing replaced experience of the work.	12/11/2015 11:34 AM
5	I previously had extensive training before being Ordained as a Deacon.	12/11/2015 10:42 AM
6	None	12/11/2015 7:35 AM
7	I found it all to be very helpful.	12/10/2015 11:18 PM
8	Very little emphasis was placed on the Biblical qualifications.	12/5/2015 11:58 AM

## Elder Preparedness

**Q8 When you became an elder for the first time, overall, how prepared did you feel to carry out the responsibilities of an elder?**

Answered: 30 Skipped: 5



Answer Choices	Responses
Not prepared at all	16.67% 5
A little prepared	16.67% 5
Somewhat prepared	43.33% 13
Very prepared	23.33% 7
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>

## Elder Preparedness

### Q9 What have been your key responsibilities serving as an elder?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 6

#	Responses	Date
1	Making decisions about the future direction and mission of our church.	12/13/2015 4:07 PM
2	mission committee adm.	12/12/2015 8:40 PM
3	Chair of Nominations Chair of Worship and Music Commissioner at some Presbytery meetings	12/12/2015 10:02 AM
4	Prepaid the monthly newsletter for 2 years and then organizing Senior Activities for 2 years. I was also on the Deacon Committee (Our Church has gone from a one Session w/o deacons back to 2 sets of officers.) Also I was on the Admin/Person. Committee for 3 years. I also did birthday Christmas and Easter cards for the pastor and staff to sign and send out to the Youth in our Church.	12/12/2015 10:00 AM
5	Mission Committee Clerk of Session Search committee for new pastor	12/11/2015 10:45 PM
6	Our church fits the definition of churches depicted in Thom S. Rainer's "Autopsy of a Dying Church". I felt called to do all I could to help lead a change for the better. So this was my perceived key responsibility. No one else seemed to want change. The church recently called an excellent new pastor who is was put in place without the Presbytery's normal process of an "Interim Pastor" for a period of healing, self evaluation and revival. The majority of the church leadership thinks that he is all that is needed to save the church. I am concerned the new pastor will become our interim pastor, a great disservice to an idealistic new pastor. The church needs saving in the sense of turning around a longer than a 15 year decline in membership and a congregation whose giving only covers \$200K of the \$300K annual expenses. The difference made up by selling assets obtained from bequests. The assets are bought and sold without the session or congregation being specifically informed. Bequests and capital gains are not shown on the income statement. A cash flow statement is never prepared or presented and there is no long term plan to become cash flow positive. God willing more bequests will come to keep us statically afloat. The church had almost burned out all able volunteers with previous leadership taking the approach that each session member took a role as committee chairman and did all the work himself. There was no effort to recruit new volunteers to help the chairmen and they could only manage to do sustain the status quo tasks. As an aerospace project engineer my main practical role was with technical tasks. I run the sound board on most Sundays and for funerals etc. I also lead the purchase/maintenance and operation of the video/sound/Air Conditioning/ systems and miscellaneous technical projects.	12/11/2015 11:56 AM
7	20+ years many: chair of trustees, trustee, Christian Ed chair, Steeardship, chair Long Range planning, chair of campus master planning, co-chair capital campaign, interim senior pastor search, chair senior pastor search, many others	12/11/2015 11:34 AM
8	Financial Ministry, Worship Ministry, Mission and Outreach, Property, I have also been responsible for the organization and operation of a Church sponsored Health Fair for the Community. Also have been responsible for training new elders and deacons concerning the Book of Order.	12/11/2015 10:42 AM
9	Finance, Personnel, and Family Ministries	12/11/2015 9:50 AM
10	Attending meetings, voting on key issues, learning about the various different committees and functions of the church, and serving communion.	12/11/2015 9:08 AM
11	spiritual development	12/11/2015 7:35 AM
12	Administration Personnel committee and Finance committee	12/11/2015 6:29 AM
13	Church & Society, Mission Purpose Team, Personnel & Finance & Administration Committees	12/10/2015 11:18 PM
14	Attending meetings; contributing thoughts and opinions. On the Children Christian Education Committee	12/10/2015 4:46 PM
15	Trying to restart Women's Fellowship. In my previous church I performed all aspects except Treasurer. I was also church Moderator.	12/10/2015 2:57 PM
16	I head the Music & Worship Committee. Attend regular scheduled meetings.	12/10/2015 1:57 PM
17	Monthly meetings, assisting with communion, serving as needed to assist deacons	12/7/2015 2:13 PM
18	Finances	12/6/2015 10:26 AM
19	Serve communion, participate in Session meetings, support church events	12/5/2015 2:57 PM

## Elder Preparedness

20	Represented the Missions committee. I am currently serving on COM (Committee on Ministry) for ECO.	12/5/2015 11:58 AM
21	Personnel, manual of operations, updating bylaws.	12/4/2015 8:17 PM
22	Leadership of exiting PCUSA Small groups Property Christian Education I have over 12 years experience with most of it at Grace so I have done most everything. I tend to stay away from financial and HR.	12/4/2015 10:32 AM
23	I personally feel serving members who are going through difficult situations has been my main responsibility.	12/4/2015 9:48 AM
24	This is my second term. Both times I have been involved with the property committee caring for the campus and building.	12/4/2015 9:42 AM
25	Only just elected and truly start my term in January 2016	12/4/2015 9:40 AM
26	policy	12/4/2015 9:33 AM
27	Discernment and Leadership in Gracious Separation Process, Pastor Nominating Committee, Preschool Leadership Committee, Children's Ministry, Church Events, Prayer and Pastoral Care	12/4/2015 9:32 AM
28	Served on many committees ...most as the moderator HR Ministry Mission Pastor Nominating Building campaign New member Etc	12/4/2015 9:30 AM
29	Being part of the Human Resource Ministry	12/4/2015 9:30 AM

## Elder Preparedness

### Q10 What responsibilities for an elder did you feel most prepared to carryout?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 6

#	Responses	Date
1	All of them.	12/13/2015 4:07 PM
2	session meetings	12/12/2015 8:40 PM
3	Worship and Music Comm.	12/12/2015 10:02 AM
4	Any given to me.	12/12/2015 10:00 AM
5	Liaison with Deacons and Mission since I had served with both. Welcoming of new members, baptisms and weddings	12/11/2015 10:45 PM
6	The technical tasks described above.	12/11/2015 11:56 AM
7	Love of Christ's church knowing He placed me where I can serve Him. My business background helped deal with the business aspect of church work.	12/11/2015 11:34 AM
8	Have understood the responsibilities of an Elder and Deacon but learned the specifics of the particular Ministry on the job.	12/11/2015 10:42 AM
9	Finance and Personnel	12/11/2015 9:50 AM
10	All of them, really, given my knowledge of the church structure as a lifelong Presbyterian and the established policies and practices of our church. We have a really good staff and system in place.	12/11/2015 9:08 AM
11	spiritual development	12/11/2015 7:35 AM
12	my business back ground	12/11/2015 6:29 AM
13	Mission Purpose and Finance & Administration	12/10/2015 11:18 PM
14	Basic church responsibilities - usher, greeter, communion, Sunday school	12/10/2015 4:46 PM
15	Assistant Treasurer and Moderator.	12/10/2015 2:57 PM
16	Dependability and being responsible for the part I played as an Elder.	12/10/2015 1:57 PM
17	Having served as a deacon for several years helped me become family with church details.	12/7/2015 2:13 PM
18	Finances	12/6/2015 10:28 AM
19	witnessing championing church's vision supporting church events	12/5/2015 2:57 PM
20	I was well aware of the Biblical requirements.	12/5/2015 11:58 AM
21	All of them.	12/4/2015 8:17 PM
22	Property, to leave PCUSA, Christian education and small groups, high administrative skill set	12/4/2015 10:32 AM
23	Leadership - planning for and implementing processes to reach goals set by the church to increase membership, member involvement and the feeling of community among members as well as growing our mission outreach and helping people mature in their relationship with Christ.	12/4/2015 9:48 AM
24	I was in business, a Ford and Chevrolet dealer. My business experience helps me guide policy decisions and business affairs of the church.	12/4/2015 9:42 AM
25	Following God's plan for our church	12/4/2015 9:40 AM
26	best direction policy	12/4/2015 9:33 AM
27	Leadership, Children's Ministry, Prayer and Pastoral Care	12/4/2015 9:32 AM
28	Helping in organizational and business practices	12/4/2015 9:30 AM
29	Previous corporate experince	12/4/2015 9:30 AM

## Elder Preparedness

### Q11 What responsibilities for an elder did you feel least prepared to carryout?

Answered: 28 Skipped: 7

#	Responses	Date
1	Being on a committee.	12/13/2015 4:07 PM
2	Commissioner at Presbytery Mtg.	12/12/2015 10:02 AM
3	Not sure.	12/12/2015 10:00 AM
4	Asking for more money. I became an elder as our previous pastor retired, then with an interim pastor and now with our new pastor. It was a big time of change. I learned by listening to the experienced elders, praying and gradually became more comfortable giving opinions and making decisions. We had to be open to change, accepting of new ways and then convince the congregation. Monetary and budget decisions are still something I shy away from due to lack of experience. I still do not feel I qualify as our church's "spiritual leader". Is my faith truly strong enough to be a leader? I am more of a helper than leader...perhaps too many years as a deacon!	12/11/2015 10:45 PM
5	The theology related aspects like order of worship, church traditions, public speaking and advocacy of issues which led me to Presbyterian USA and espoused in the Presbytery National position statements most of which are older congregation are lukewarm to if not in opposition. These issues are about things such as diversity, Israel, LGBT etc.	12/11/2015 11:56 AM
6	The political aspect of volunteer members and many hidden agendas over the years. Everyone doesn't play nice.	12/11/2015 11:34 AM
7	See 10 above.	12/11/2015 10:42 AM
8	Family Ministries	12/11/2015 9:50 AM
9	N/A, given the above and the confidence that our church has in its session members.	12/11/2015 9:08 AM
10	financial	12/11/2015 7:35 AM
11	none	12/11/2015 6:29 AM
12	Personnel	12/10/2015 11:18 PM
13	Understanding Book of Order, rules, guidelines. General information on what the responsibilities are of an elder.	12/10/2015 4:46 PM
14	Mission	12/10/2015 2:57 PM
15	I have to say most of it.	12/10/2015 1:57 PM
16	If asked to serve on HR , how managing a pastor will work.	12/7/2015 2:13 PM
17	None	12/6/2015 10:26 AM
18	providing specificity into ECO tenets	12/5/2015 2:57 PM
19	The workings of the Session/Presbytery.	12/5/2015 11:58 AM
20	Worship support.	12/4/2015 8:17 PM
21	When I first started I would say praying out loud and needed more spiritual maturity. This would have been mid 80's early 90's.	12/4/2015 10:32 AM
22	It is difficult for me to sit quietly while the wealthy people with an agenda carry out their personal missions. But that is what is requested/required.	12/4/2015 9:48 AM
23	I am of the opinion I am depended upon to think logically in helping to guide by using my experience and common sense.	12/4/2015 9:42 AM
24	If required to teach	12/4/2015 9:40 AM
25	Time involved	12/4/2015 9:33 AM
26	Church Politics	12/4/2015 9:32 AM
27	Church polity...it bores me to tears	12/4/2015 9:30 AM
28	Mission involvement	12/4/2015 9:30 AM



## Elder Preparedness

### Q12 What would you suggest be part of a training program for new elders in order to make it really effective?

Answered: 27 Skipped: 8

#	Responses	Date
1	Having a clear view of the direction and the ability to understand dissent.	12/13/2015 4:07 PM
2	training by the minister	12/12/2015 8:40 PM
3	Meeting with previous Elders who served and with Pastor to discuss expectations. Reading material would be helpful too	12/12/2015 10:02 AM
4	With our last Pastor for 9ne meeting both old and new Elders had one Session together. I think this was a very effective way of training.	12/12/2015 10:00 AM
5	Spending time with the heads of each committee so you really understand how your church operates. Study guides. I would like to know how other churches operate. Is there something we can do better by learning from other churches?	12/11/2015 10:45 PM
6	First of all the Presbytery needs to take the lead in ensuring member churches have written policies for Personnel (employment, vacations, holidays, outside jobs, hiring, firing, part-time, etc.), Purchasing, Facility Use, Standard Accounting Practices and Audits. There is much petty and sometimes more serious abuse to the detriment of the church. Second, once it is clear that Presbytery is an honest broker impartially holding to a uniform set of standards and holding individual churches accountable, they should take the lead in presenting training classes starting with the pastors, especially Sr. Pastors who tend to become very entitled and operate according to church politics rather than for the good of the Church. The Elders should have this same training at the beginning of their first term and again for the second term so that Pastors and Elders and the Presbytery are all operating from the same playbook. Key elements of the Book of Order should be covered. Their should be time for local church evaluation and rating on Presbyterian "Best Practices" and honest discussion and goal setting for the next year.	12/11/2015 11:56 AM
7	1st vetting elders to understand their commitment and define roles. Understanding the massive Book of Order that establishes rules and yet sometimes just guideline. Heart and prayer important to do God's work not your own.	12/11/2015 11:34 AM
8	I believe training in the Book of Order and Confessions is essential but just as important is providing time and activities to allow Session members to get to know each other and bond.	12/11/2015 10:42 AM
9	Elders should serve on committees prior to being and elder. There should be an experienced elder mentoring new ones.	12/11/2015 9:50 AM
10	More discussion of the Book of Order.	12/11/2015 9:08 AM
11	none	12/11/2015 7:35 AM
12	be assigned to a Elder for 6 months	12/11/2015 6:29 AM
13	That they understand their responsibilities as an elder according to the Book of Order	12/10/2015 11:18 PM
14	Understanding what are the responsibilities and what is involved in being an elder.	12/10/2015 4:46 PM
15	Meeting with previous Elders. A 1/2 day training session( or perhaps less) to go over duties and responsibilities.	12/10/2015 1:57 PM
16	Detail elder committees and responsibilities and ask for area of service from beginning as elder.	12/7/2015 2:13 PM
17	Get to know all elders	12/6/2015 10:26 AM
18	tenets of ECO	12/5/2015 2:57 PM
19	The Biblical requirements, an overview, of at least, the doctrine of Salvation, church polity, the responsibilities of a member of the session/denomination.	12/5/2015 11:58 AM
20	Specefic job descriptions	12/4/2015 8:17 PM

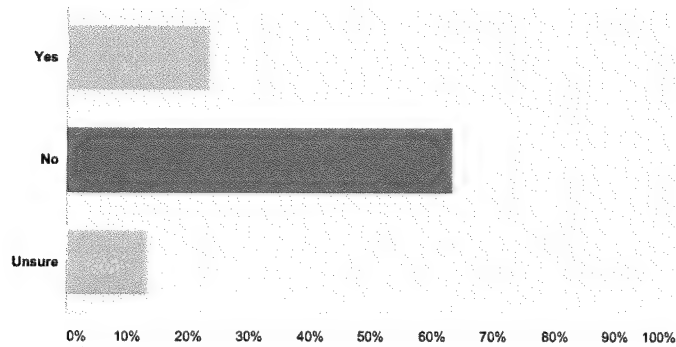
## Elder Preparedness

21	1. You could check the ECO website and use some of the educational materials. 2. They each need to write a statement of faith after explaining to them the format 3. An understanding of Roberts Rules of Order 4. That they are the ruling elders and you are the teaching elder and some of those concepts as to what there duties are and are not. 5..How the Presbyterian church is governed and key parts of the Book of Order. 6. A survey of their spiritual gifts to help them know what their call is in the church. 7. A historical perspective of what happens to sessions and churches that turn their ruling power over to the teaching elder. Our church belongs to God and not the pastor. The biggest mistake for me was to volunteer to lead certain committees as a personal growth experience. What I learned was that to be an effective leader for the church is to pursue opportunities that play into my strengths and not my weaknesses. Important to have a balanced Session.	12/4/2015 10:32 AM
22	1) A clear job description. I don't need an elder title to validate my place in God's world. It appears there are a few people who do, but then the questions is, is that the type of person God calls to be an Elder? 2) Meeting purpose. There are plenty of people that need time and love and an elder meeting for the sake of meeting is a waste of time and God's resources.	12/4/2015 9:48 AM
23	It would be helpful to have a written "job description".	12/4/2015 9:42 AM
24	Understand the denomination and governing rules, a clear guideline what the expectations will be	12/4/2015 9:40 AM
25	Don't over burden the elder	12/4/2015 9:33 AM
26	A short and brief booklet that outlines responsibilities and expectations Class that is led by Pastor ...reviews key points in booklet	12/4/2015 9:30 AM
27	No suggestion	12/4/2015 9:30 AM

# Elder Preparedness

**Q13 During the time you have served as an elder, did the church provide you with on-going training to help you conduct your responsibilities?**

Answered: 30 Skipped: 5



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	23.33%	7
No	63.33%	19
Unsure	13.33%	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>

## Elder Preparedness

### Q14 What kinds of training did the church provide even after you had served for longer than a year?

Answered: 27 Skipped: 8

#	Responses	Date
1	We were given a book that compared our endeavors to those found in the Bible and we discussed them as a group.	12/13/2015 4:07 PM
2	none	12/12/2015 8:40 PM
3	none	12/12/2015 10:02 AM
4	None, did not feel necessary.	12/12/2015 10:00 AM
5	Our new pastor provided us with study guides which we answered and discussed questions at the beginning of alternate meetings. Some session meetings were prayer and discussion which brought all of us closer. It is very important to form a close relationship with the other elders so you are all working together. Our presbytery also had great suggestions since they were also helping us in the selection process for a new pastor.	12/11/2015 10:45 PM
6	On the job training and social pressure to conform to the status quo, not rock the boat or question de facto policies.	12/11/2015 11:56 AM
7	Discussions, experience, bringing new elders on board. New leadership after 25 years with pass pastor brought new life and better leadership in focus on what is or charge and purpose as the board of elders.	12/11/2015 11:34 AM
8	Attending training sessions each year and providing subscriptions to Presbyterian Outlook.	12/11/2015 10:42 AM
9	Only minimal-Attending presbytery meetings and providing information from the Presbytery	12/11/2015 9:50 AM
10	We have started some training with a text regarding leadership.	12/11/2015 9:08 AM
11	resource materials and yearly training	12/11/2015 7:35 AM
12	Moved and changed churches and training was not provided to anyone	12/10/2015 11:18 PM
13	Not applicable	12/10/2015 4:46 PM
14	One retreat with an interim pastor.	12/10/2015 2:57 PM
15	None. I might add as an area of interest to you. I agreed to take the role of Elder a lot because it was very hard to fill the need(don't misunderstand I did put prayer to my final decision. Also I had agreed to take the chair for the Worship & Music and it was my understanding the requirement was that you become and Elder.	12/10/2015 1:57 PM
16	just finishing my first year	12/7/2015 2:13 PM
17	None	12/6/2015 10:26 AM
18	None.	12/5/2015 11:58 AM
19	Biannual session retreats, monthly triads.	12/4/2015 8:17 PM
20	There were several false starts but basically my experience has been that I had to learn myself and conduct my own spiritual growth through Bible study, taking outside Christian education classes, praying, etc.	12/4/2015 10:32 AM
21	n/a	12/4/2015 9:48 AM
22	There was no training.	12/4/2015 9:42 AM
23	This will be my first time serving	12/4/2015 9:40 AM
24	No professional training, just information updates	12/4/2015 9:33 AM
25	N/a	12/4/2015 9:32 AM
26	None	12/4/2015 9:30 AM
27	None	12/4/2015 9:30 AM

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## VITA

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### *Education*

High School Diploma	Charlotte Latin School, Charlotte, NC, 1997
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### *Professional Experience*

April 2015-present	Pastor, Glades Presbyterian Church Boca Raton, FL
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